

LIFTING THE VEIL
**A NEW STUDY OF THE
SHEELA-NA-GIGS
OF
BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

by

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In Memory Of
My Mother
Margaret Wyness McVeigh
(1924-2002)

and

Michael Camille
(1958-2002)

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ABSTRACT

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Doctor of Philosophy

Lifting the Veil: A New Study of the Sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland

Theresa Catherine Oakley

The stylised naked female figures carved in stone and wood found upon medieval churches and tower houses, known as sheela-na-gigs, have long attracted both academic and popular attention. Consequently, a diverse body of literature on the subject exists, yet much of it, especially the more easily available works, features numerous inaccuracies. This thesis represents a move towards a detailed, accurate and archaeologically sensitive record of the sheela-na-gigs in Britain and Ireland, and establishes their study firmly within the orbit of mainstream research. Throughout, context is a central concern. Accordingly, in-depth analysis of the carvings is used to foreground the typical characteristics of a sheela-na-gig and their architectural and sculptural settings. The medieval repertoire of architectural imagery and the social and religious frameworks in which these images were produced is explored, before turning to look at the complex meanings evoked by the figures. It is argued that previous interpretations of the sheela-na-gig as a fertility figure, Celtic goddess, or image of lust have occluded the deeper significance of the image, whose ambiguity and danger is more suggestive of a herald of the sacred or otherworldly icon. This is substantiated by an exploration of the vital links between the grotesque, monstrous, ambiguous and the sacred, together with influences derived from philosophy and classical mythology, as expressed in western medieval culture.

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LEGEND FOR CHARTS

ARMS

LRAH = left arm raised above head

RRAH = right arm raised above head

BARAH = both arms raised above head

LIFB = left arm in front of body

RIFB = right arm in front of body

BAIFB = both arms in front of body

LBB = left arm behind body

RBB = right arm behind body

BABB = both arms behind body

OAROIBB = one arm raised one in front or behind body

OAIFFBOABB = one arm in front of body one arm behind body

AAS = arms at sides

BABOAE = both arms bent out at elbow

LEGS

HRK = hands round knees

LWA = legs wide apart

KSBWA = knees slightly bent legs wide apart

LT = legs together

VULVA

DL = disproportionately large

FIV = fingers in vulva

BELLY

BBP = belly button present

PATTERNS/OBJECTS ASSOCIATED

P-F = petalled flower

PREFACE

This is a thesis which takes as its starting point a body of material objects commonly known as ‘sheela-na-gigs’, a body of modern written material about these images, and the relationship between these two forms of ‘evidence’. An understanding of this relationship is crucial because it has affected how sheelas have been viewed, both from within academia and in more popular texts. My introduction to sheela-na-gigs began in 1987 when, as an undergraduate, I went on a field trip to Ireland with the Department of Archaeology at Southampton, and was intrigued by an image that we saw at the church at Killinaboy, Co. Clare [**Plate 1**]. My own archaeological interests at that time were more oriented towards prehistory, in particular upper palaeolithic cave art, so I was no more than intrigued by this strange image. But clearly a seed had been sown.

The flowering of this interest did not occur until 1995, when I purchased a small booklet [Roberts: 1995] in Skibbereen, Co. Cork. By then it was evident that there was a growing amount of popular interest in the subject, but Roberts’ booklet made me aware that in-depth, accurate, and recent academic research on the subject appeared to be severely lacking, and I felt a PhD on the subject was needed. I was unaware at that time of Andersen’s [1977] published version of his PhD which largely looks at sheela-na-gigs. However, when I did locate a copy my desire to research sheelas was only strengthened, for I felt that Andersen’s work, although a tremendous achievement, was severely limited in its approach.

I was cheered to find Conleth Manning’s comment who, in referring to Andersen’s 1977 study, said “a new study of all the sheela-na-gigs now known is badly needed because errors have crept into the literature and continue to be repeated” [Manning 1987: 282]. Similarly, McMahon & Roberts’ statement that there is “an underlying lack of research into the subject” [2001: 7] has further encouraged me. As I found more and more of the literature on sheelas, I realised that none of the extant literature provided a serious academic study of the subject or used a theoretical framework. I felt justified in opening up the subject

again for research, despite being informed by one academic (at a university other than Southampton) that she thought that all that could be said about sheelas had been said.

The pages that follow are the product of my research journey. This journey has traversed a somewhat organic path, and my writing style reflects this, I feel. For example, the earliest material is the literature critique, which was at times difficult to work with (I am thinking particularly of my analysis of Andersen's study here). This section does not flow as well as the later material on medieval contexts and the sacred, by which time I was much more familiar with the material in terms of fieldwork and reading. It is a good demonstration of how both the research process itself and my understanding of the subject matter have grown.

In terms of my theoretical perspective, my academic path has changed from being influenced by processualism as an undergraduate, to re-entering academia ten years later as a research student, having by-passed post-processualism, and being thrown into post-modernism. If my own study in this thesis reflects any postmodern tendencies, I suggest it is more a reflection of the academic milieu in which I have been immersed for the last four years rather than a deliberate attempt by me to take a postmodern stance. There are elements of my study which may be so construed, for example, the use of the concept 'ambiguity'; however, I argue for this from within a medieval context, not a post-modern one.

My theoretical perspective throughout this thesis has been one of not being informed by a particular theoretical perspective. I have been eclectic in my theoretical persuasion. Whilst not espousing a division of understanding of sculptural imagery into binaries (official/marginal, good/evil, Christian/pagan), I accept it has influenced how such imagery has been viewed by earlier scholars [for example, Weir & Jerman 1987, and Kenaan-Kedar 1995]. However, through concepts such as Turner's [1969] theory of *communitas* and structure, I investigate other ways of seeing such apparently simple dichotomies, and apply them to my understanding of sheelas. I also resist an evolutionary and diffusionistic understanding that much of the earlier art-historical approach follows. In addition, I do not accept the theoretical view that art can be seen in

terms of being like a language and ‘read’ like text; nor do I accept that it ‘is’ a language. I believe that art is a form of expression that is specifically not language-derived, and consequently not constrained by linguistic semantics and syntax. The late Michael Camille, a great scholar of medieval marginal imagery whose work I refer to frequently throughout this thesis, similarly shares this view. Much of what is deemed ‘great art’ by the art-historical canon conforms to such a constraint, but in my opinion this is more to do with self-created and -perpetuated elitism within the art world, and ultimately control, than personal and individual artistic expression.

My seemingly ramshackle approach of applying disparate theoretical views in fact enables me to view the sheelas as ambiguous representations with a deep spiritual significance and resonance. The sheela-na-gigs themselves have led me, via the research journey, to my understanding of them. This understanding is one that allows for change in meaning for the images over time, but concurrently allows sheelas to be seen as art objects imbued with magico-social cross-temporal significance.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of my thesis is to provide new and accurate informative material on sheela-na-gigs, in terms of their description, their analysis, and their placement in various contexts, whether medieval or modern.

I also aim to dispel the misconception frequently put forward in the literature that sheela-na-gigs are sexual or erotic representations. This is my over-riding research goal: to demonstrate that sheela-na-gigs are not sexual images used for a simple apotropaic or didactic 'function'. Such an interpretation is a reflection of the modern-day, western or westernised, obsession with the naked (particularly female) human form, and that such nakedness can only be seen in sexual terms. An apotropaic and didactic understanding has been widely applied to exhibitionist figures [Weir 1980; Andersen 1977; Weir & Jerman 1986], and sheela-na-gigs in particular [Andersen 1977; Feehan 1982; Weir & Jerman 1986; Cherry 1992; Kelly 1996].

The notion of apotropaia is derived from anthropology and reflects a historical link between the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology, particularly around the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, but which may not actually be that applicable. For example, the anthropological understanding of witchcraft (which would include notions of apotropaia) derived from small-scale tribal societies may not translate that well to archaeological material of the medieval period such as sheela-na-gigs. From what we know about contemporary behaviour and attitudes in the medieval period (which I address in Chapter Three, part iii), such an anthropological translation may be completely inappropriate, unless we view apotropaia in terms of universals. Sheelas are frequently seen as apotropaic images. Is this association purely a legacy of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anthropological influence on the interpretation of material objects that are difficult to categorise as anything other than associated with 'ritual', or 'magic', or 'witchcraft', or is there evidence for an actual apotropaic aspect for sheelas, and what might this be? I attempt to address this issue in my thesis by looking at what apotropaia and associated notions of the evil eye really mean.

A didactic interpretation has been an accepted function, particularly within the traditional art-historical canon, of sculptural and other ecclesiastical imagery since the concept of the Church's iconography representing 'lessons in stone' was developed in the nineteenth century. The didactic notion supports the idea "that the Church intended its figural and illustrative art for the instruction of the illiterate population, who could thus 'read' the monuments" [Bober in Mâle 1978: xvi]. This interpretation was initiated by Victor Hugo in *Notre Dame de Paris* and developed by Didron, a great friend of Hugo's, who was secretary of the French Committee on Arts and Monuments which had been created in 1835. Didron was especially interested in iconography, devising a system for studying the medieval cathedral based on the thirteenth century encyclopaedia *Speculum universale* by Vincent of Beauvais. Didron proposed that Chartres cathedral contained all the elements described in the encyclopaedia, and therefore that it represented an 'encyclopaedia in stone'. Mâle (whom I discuss more fully in a later chapter of this thesis), writing at a time when iconography was becoming established as a separate discipline within art history at the end of the nineteenth century, perpetuated this didactic concept.

As well as endorsing a high/low split between the clerical elite and the uneducated masses, a didactic approach also supports the interpretation of sculpture as text, and is thus essentially semiotic. This approach still has great currency amongst architectural historians. Stalley [1999] devotes a whole chapter to the 'language of architecture', for example. However, iconography is not architecture, despite such function being sought for it sometimes (for example, Andersen's proposal that sheelas may have had a corbel function in Ireland, which I refer to again later). O'Keeffe [2003: 290-1] identifies language as automatically implying meaning, although he criticises a structuralist approach for producing a narrow range of meanings. Whether architecture, and architectural sculpture, is seen as a language or *like* a language, syntactically or semantically, still addresses the issue in terms of language comparisons. This is, I suggest, a restrictive interpretation for iconography. Meaning is not necessarily invested via language, and language does not automatically imply meaning. Thus, I try and address the question throughout this thesis of whether medieval iconographic imagery, and in particular that of sheela-na-gigs, offers an

alternative way of accessing meaning that is not language derived, and how we might get at that meaning.

Whilst I recognise the influence that the didactic understanding has had on post-nineteenth century interpretations of ecclesiastical imagery, it cannot in any case hold true for all sheela-na-gigs because a good number of them are found on secular buildings. Thus, I am interested in how interpretations other than didactic may broaden - and also focus - our understanding of what sheelas represented and represent – what they meant and mean, as a representation of an idea or ideas, overt or covert. However, sheelas are found on a great number of churches as well as in secular settings, which is why a confused understanding of their link with apotropaia has presumably arisen. Sheelas have been seen as an image that challenges Christianity (thereby allowing the logic of a ‘pagan’ origin) rather than something that might be part of it. Thus, their presence on churches has been interpreted in terms of warding off evil, as fear-inducers warning against sin.

To unravel sheelas from these restrictive interpretations I am necessarily interdisciplinary in my approach and use of material. I have chosen supporting arguments and elucidation from other writers’ work on medieval imagery, theology, anthropology, sociology, and feminism, amongst others, because the ideas contained therein work well together, in terms of supporting a coherent developing argument, and also in corresponding to the data. I have deliberately avoided binary argument for, ultimately, my subject matter is all about breaking boundaries and not conforming to an ‘either/or’ scenario.

My initial reading of the sheela literature alerted me to their not having been given a proper or fair assessment, their historical context seemed to have been ignored, and their description needed validating. I also had an intuitive feeling that there was an obscured deeper meaning attached to sheelas, which had been appropriated, and which was not at all evident at a superficial level.

To this end my thesis consists of:

- 1) a revised and corrected (although not complete) corpus, each image having been personally visited, photographed and described in detail;

- 2) an analysis of my data, resulting in statistics that clearly demonstrate relationships of the variables that may be seen in the images. This is entirely original work which validates persuasive arguments about the evidence for sheelas, and sets them in perspective;
- 3) embedding sheelas in their art-historical, post-medieval, modern academic and popular contexts, and aspects of their medieval context;
- 4) and, beyond this, embedding them in their sacred context.

Increasingly, as my research has deepened, the realm of the sacred in connection with sheelas has become more and more relevant. It is not perhaps something that is frequently afforded them because they have been embedded in an andro-centric Christianised interpretation, and the spiritual realm has been distanced from them. Because they appear to challenge categorisation within a Christian context they have been seen as a 'pagan' skeuomorph, demonised, and seen in terms of fulfilling only a didactic or aversive function.

On outline of the thesis

Chapter One: I present a general understanding of sheelas, what they are, how many exist, how they have been viewed. I identify themes found within the literature and questions and problems surrounding sheelas, and I briefly discuss other Romanesque images which sheelas may be associated with.

Chapter Two: Concerns discussion of what my data analysis shows. I begin with a presentation of the methodology used for my data collection. I then look at the evidence for sheelas as discovered through analysis of my fieldwork results. This produces some interesting outcomes for and against certain interpretations of the images.

Chapter Three: Deals with contexts. I look in depth at how sheelas have been interpreted historically, critiquing the literature on the subject. The literature on sheela-na-gigs is one of the contexts for them, as are the medieval and art-historical, which I also discuss here.

Chapter Four: Focuses on the realm of the sacred and how I view sheelas within this larger context. I put forward my understanding of their connection with the concept of the evil eye, with Baubo and Medusa, with apotropaia, and mysticism.

My analysis results are used to support aspects of this. The importance of the notion of ambiguity in relation to sheelas is discussed.

Conclusion: Looks at the post-medieval response to sheelas, which brings us back to the present. I locate my study within the contemporary literature on the subject, and identify areas for further research, much of which I hope to pursue post-doctorally. I highlight some conclusions that I have reached about sheelas.

The appendices are not to be seen as merely additional or supporting information. Rather they provide the essential bedrock upon which the thesis is constructed. The gazetteer in particular is of great value, and can stand alone as a piece of work in its own right. It presents my updated verified data about the images with further related information such as what previous authors have said about each image. The gazetteer is the raw data of this thesis; however, I also include this data in its statistical form in appendix two, which was the second stage in the analysis of the fieldwork. Stage three was the production of the charts as found in Chapter Two.

Thus, what I present in this thesis is a solid core of fieldwork, which through my analysis produces new insights into sheelas as material entities, and a thorough discussion of various contexts for this material evidence. As a result, I am drawn to a personal conclusion about the sacredness of the material, focusing on theoretical and philosophical questions and arguments in relation to it.

CHAPTER ONE

Object or subject: what, or who, are sheela-na-gigs?

For some 200 years the images of female stone figures known as 'sheela-na-gigs' have become the focus of attention, with what seems like almost cyclical regularity, to antiquarians, archaeologists, sculptural historians, and, more recently, neo-pagans, neo-antiquarians, and feminists. Their imagery appears to always have provoked a response, whether benign or horrified.

Sheela-na-gigs, in my view, are not part of mainstream culture¹; they live on the edge. I see them as having an energy that gives them 'life', as, indeed, most of the Romanesque 'marginal' imagery has. To judge from the array of internet resources on sheelas, and their inclusion in various commercial media such as figurines and jewellery, they are, like stone circles and other prehistoric monuments, another example of archaeological material culture that has been appropriated, or embraced, by those who feel drawn to 'New Age' spirituality and ideals. From this New Age perspective sheelas may often be seen as representing the goddess, a symbol of the divine feminine principle, and in this way are part of a sub-cultural response to the norm. In a sense, therefore, not much has altered since their (probable) twelfth century creation. Sheelas can be viewed as marginal images: marginal in subject matter; often (although not always) marginal in location; and marginal in a wider philosophical sense, as representing something on the margins of society. But the question of marginality is complex, and I return to it later in this chapter.

Sheelas as material entity

Sheela-na-gigs are stone representations of the naked human female form, usually described in the literature as distinguished by their graphic display of the genitals. They are broadly dated, by the structures they are found on, to the twelfth to seventeenth centuries AD. Their size ranges from 40-60 cm in height,

¹ By 'mainstream', I mean that which is adopted by the majority of people in our modern, consumer-driven, secular, materialistic western society.

and they are carved in high or low relief, or by incised lines. It is not possible to be precise about the number of extant sheelas as there are some that are dubious in their classification. However, a rough estimate is about 135 for Britain and Ireland, with many of these being in Ireland. This, of course, may simply mean that for some reason, more sheelas have survived in Ireland, and does not necessarily mean that more were produced there. There are also purported to be about 100 sheelas in western France [Weir & Jerman 1986], some in northern Spain, and possibly a few in Norway [Krüger:1994]. Some of these images are questionable in their classification as sheelas.

Many of the sheelas are in limestone and are badly weathered. Some are standing, such as at Blackhall Castle, Co. Kildare – a thirteenth century castle with later additions – the sheela is placed by a doorway; some are squatting, as at Cashel, Co Tipperary. The legs may be widely splayed, as at Clenagh Castle, Co. Clare, where the thighs and lower legs are at right angles. The arms are commonly placed in front, usually associated with the genital area in some way, e.g. holding the vulva open with either one or both hands. One arm may go behind the leg, the other in front (as at Clonmel, Co. Tipperary), or both arms may go behind the legs (as at Ballyportry Castle, Co. Clare), or both in front (Figile River, Co. Offaly). Several sheelas hold objects. For example, at Kiltinane Castle, Co. Tipperary, the sheela holds objects described by Kelly [1996] as a mirror in the sheela's left hand and possibly a comb in her right, this being suggested due to supposed similarities with late C15th mermaid representations; another sheela at Romsey Abbey holds a staff or crozier in her right hand and a disc-type object in her left.

Location and dating

Sheelas are found externally on twelfth century (and later) churches, often above the doorway or to the side of a window arch; on quoins [external corners] of tower houses (the tower house is a defensive dwelling in Ireland dating to the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries); on medieval town walls (e.g. Fethard, Co. Tipperary); occasionally associated with gates and pillars; and single totally ex-situ sheelas, found dumped in a river, for example. However, many of those that are part of a building are definitely ex-original situ, and so the best that can be said is that they were placed on these structures some time during the life of

the building. This is of significance as it means a choice was made by someone to do so. However, it also means that there is a problem with dating these representations. It is possible that some of them were produced much earlier than the structures they are found on, and were later chosen to be incorporated as part of a pattern of re-use.

Sheelas as named entity

Where does the name 'sheela-na-gig' originate? The earliest references to sheelas are given by Weir & Jerman [1986:15, citing Corish:1981, no page references given] as being from diocesan and provincial statutes in Ireland of the seventeenth century:

- 1) " ... a Diocesan (Ossory) regulation of 1676 ordering sheela-na-gigs to be burned," and
- 2) " ... the Kilmore diocesan synod excluded from all sacraments ... those whom the synod calls *gierador* – they might perhaps be described as 'living sheela-na-gigs'.

These citations may not refer necessarily to stone carvings, but may signify an originally greater number of wooden sheelas, or may be alluding to wisewomen or witches. As will be seen, the concept of sheela-na-gig and witch became intertwined.

Barbara Freitag [1999] discusses the name 'sheela-na-gig' in her article (which I further discuss in Chapter Three). She refers to a dance tune called sheela-na-gig, although this is spelt 'Sheelin-a-gig' in Michael Banim's novel 'Crohoore of the Bill Hook' published in 1825. Around 1790 a booklet about Irish traditional dances contains a dance called 'Sheela na Gigg', in its index spelt 'Sheela na gig'. Freitag deduces, quite correctly I am sure, that the name 'sheela-na-gig' in its various spellings was a much more widely used and known term than has previously been thought.

All the modern authors seem to broadly agree that the term was first acknowledged 'officially' in 1840 when used by a local country person to an Ordnance Survey officer (John O'Donovan) at Kiltinane Church, Co. Tipperary, who then subsequently published the term in his Ordnance Survey Letters

[O'Donovan: 1840]. The term was also published in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy of 1840-1844. Rynne [1987] says the name is generally accepted as being taken from the Irish 'Síle na gCíoch', sheela of the breasts, although (he says) as many of them do not actually have breasts represented this is not a very plausible explanation; the preferred term by Rynne is 'Síle i n-a giob', sheela on her hunkers, indicating a squatting posture, which many of the sheelas adopt.

In a sense, the term 'sheela-na-gig' is irrelevant, in that it is an abstract label that can only possess meaning when embedded in its social context. However, such labels may give us clues to meaning if connections can be made.

Rynne [1987] informs us that the word 'síle' is still used today by Irish-speakers as a derogatory word, meaning both ugly old women and girlish or puny boys. Is there a common ground between these two words ('síle' and 'sheela-na-gig') involving the concept of 'sheela-na-gig', whether medieval or modern? Or is the word 'síle' being construed in a modern way only, and been applied to a twelfth century image which did not have that name, or meaning, attached to it during the twelfth century or even later centuries? Is it more a reflection of modern western views of the feminine? How might it be possible to access the medieval concept of 'sheela-na-gig', if there even was one?

Themes within the literature on sheelas

The earliest work, specifically on sheelas, was conducted by nineteenth century antiquarians with the first list of sheelas appearing in the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland in 1894. The antiquarian leaning was towards seeing the sheelas as having an apotropaic (warding off evil) function.

The next period of study was in the 1920s and 1930s by Margaret Murray, and Edith Guest and her assistant Helen Roe (see Chapter Three for specific discussion of their contributions). Murray saw the sheelas as representing a continuation of a witch cult from prehistoric times into the Christian period, and Guest similarly saw them as symbols of a prehistoric fertility cult. Guest also produced a corpus of the Irish sheelas in 1935 and a typology for them.

There does not appear to be any further significant literature on sheela-na-gigs until Andersen's PhD of 1976, published in 1977 as 'The witch on the wall: medieval erotic sculpture in the British Isles'. This is the only large piece of research to be carried out which focuses mainly on sheela-na-gigs. Andersen's approach is that of an art historian and he largely catalogues and describes the sheelas, attempting to show a development from limited use on Romanesque corbels and capitals in France to a more widespread use in England and Ireland during the later middle ages. Andersen's main useful contribution is the actual catalogue or corpus that he produced, which updated and enlarged the earlier one produced by Guest. Andersen also hypothesises that sheelas demonstrate continuity from the pagan to the Christian period, a view also supported by Rynne.

Rynne, in his 'A pagan Celtic background for sheela-na-gigs?' (1987, but based on an earlier article of his from 1983), proposes that the sheelas are medieval in date, but that "prototypes" exist from the pagan Celtic Iron Age.

Weir & Jerman [1986] put forward a didactic understanding of sheela-na-gigs, and see their development in terms of diffusion, following Andersen and Rynne.²

A theme that runs throughout the literature generally, with one or two exceptions (such as Guest who tends to be more neutral), is that sheelas are "grotesque, hideous, and ugly" [Kelly 1996:35]. The use of the word 'grotesque' is often found in application to sheelas. Sheelas are seen as part of the Romanesque repertoire of sculptural motifs, and are seen, therefore, as 'grotesques'. There is, I think, some confusion with the use of the word 'grotesque' in application to sheelas. The term is often used, as the quote above demonstrates, to imply a lack of aesthetically-pleasing characteristics, and is, therefore, culturally-specific. There is also the question, sculpturally, as to whether sheelas are grotesques. I address this question later.

Kelly [1996] also supports a didactic approach for the sheelas seeing them as part of the Romanesque repertoire of exhibitionist figures, as Weir and Jerman

² For an explanation of the term 'didactic', see Introduction p. 2

do. Kelly focuses, naturally (given the title of the booklet), on the Irish sheelas in particular, supporting a diffusionistic view that images, or ideas for images, were brought back to Ireland by pilgrims (such as Irish kings and prominent churchmen) visiting Rome or Santiago de Compostela. This diffusionistic idea has been a main theme within Romanesque sculptural (and, indeed, art-historical) studies.

Although Kelly is fairly neutral in his use of descriptive language about sheelas, much of the language used by other authors (especially Andersen, Weir & Jerman, and Rynne) has an extremely male, western, heterosexual, ethno- and andro-centric bias. This approach to sheela-na-gigs needs to be focused upon and critically addressed, and redressed, which I aim to achieve within this thesis.

There have been several smaller brochures or articles written about sheelas more recently. Stella Cherry [1993] discusses sheelas from Co. Cork and states that their function is still unclear. She cites the three most common theories as being a) fertility and representing the earth mother or goddess, b) warning the faithful against the sin of lust, and c) to ward off evil. She does not subscribe to any of these theories but neither does she offer any further insights.

The literature, therefore, focuses on some or all of the following:

- 1) pure description
- 2) seeking a specific function for the sheelas (e.g. didactic, or apotropaic)
- 3) an evolutionary progression linked in with diffusionism
- 4) a modern western masculine-derived view focusing on genitalia / fertility / woman as sexual temptress connections.

Are sheela-na-gigs part of the Romanesque repertoire?

Sheelas can be seen as part of a range of marginal imagery produced during the twelfth century, which includes hybrid beasts, foliate heads, bicorporate monsters, mythical creatures, and mouth-pullers [**Plates 2-8**]. However, such inclusion obscures the sheelas' difference from other female figural marginal imagery. Such imagery includes acrobats, mermaids, and exhibitionist figures [**Plates 9-11**]. Examples of acrobats can be found at Studland (Dorset) on a corbel on the north side of the nave, where the figure has its feet up to its ears,

clearly exposing her vulva; the acrobat at Clonmacnoise, on the chancel arch of the Nuns' Chapel (Co. Offaly) which has been interpreted as a sheela [Guest 1936; Andersen 1977; see my entry in the gazetteer, Appendix One]; and the acrobat at Darley Dale (Derbyshire), which is actually male but has been wrongly identified as a sheela [see McMahon & Roberts 2001, and my entry in the gazetteer, Appendix One]. Mermaids, in particular twin-tailed ones, are linked stylistically with the Luxuria motif ³[Lubell 1994: 133-5], and as a result connections are made between Luxuria images, sheelas and mermaids [Weir & Jerman 1986, for example].

Examples of female exhibitionists can be seen at Sainte-Radegonde, Poitiers [see Weir & Jerman 1986: 114, for a photograph], where the image depicts a robed female, with hair and very large round breasts, pulling apart the outer labia of her vulva with her fingers; and at Cervatos, N. Spain, where there is a female exhibitionist acrobat on an exterior capital [see Tisdall 1998: 228, for a photograph], naked apart from a hood on her head, with legs up in the air to her ears, and her large vulva exposed.

Whilst there are images which may have one or two similar characteristics to sheelas, sheelas can still be recognised as a discrete group. I identify their distinctive features in Chapter Two. In addition, sheelas are frequently a single image, whereas many of the other female marginal figures are part of a series of images.

The use of the terms 'marginal', 'liminal', and 'grotesque'

Sheelas are usually categorised as being part of the repertoire of twelfth century sculptural 'marginal' imagery, often generalised as grotesque. Andersen [1977], Weir & Jerman [1986], and Rynne [1987] support this inclusion. It is integral to their diffusionistic understanding of the development of the image. But there are two problems with this:

- 1) What is marginal sculpture?
- 2) Are sheelas part of this?

³ The Luxuria image typically "is that of the woman suckling snakes ... her vulva sometimes disgorging or being entered by a serpent" [Weir 1980: 59]. For more about Luxuria see Leclercq-Kadaner [1975]; Weir [1980: 59]; Weir & Jerman [1986].

Marginal sculpture is a term used by several authors (Camille [1992], and Kenaan-Kedar [1995], for example) to describe those images which do not conform to the 'official' religious sculpture. In fact, Camille takes his use of the term further than Kenaan-Kedar, almost equating 'marginal' with the co-related terms 'liminal', 'ambiguous', and 'grotesque', for he sees such marginal imagery in terms of "pretend[ing] to avoid meaning ...", of celebrating "the flux of 'becoming' rather than 'being' ... " [Camille 1992: 9].

Are 'liminal' and 'marginal' inter-changeable terms? 'Liminal' can be interpreted as meaning 'threshold', and 'marginal' as 'of, written in, the margin' or 'of, at, the edge' (Oxford English Dictionary definitions). Thinking about the difference between 'marginal' and 'liminal', I would argue that something marginal has a relationship with the mainstream or the norm; it is marginal to that which is the accepted form of orthodox 'whatever'. Liminal, however, suggests something much more ethereal or unto itself, not defined by anything else; a place, a thing, a time, a part of the body, a state of mind, or a space that is betwixt and between, which allows for transformation, and transgression. Thus, following this understanding, the grotesque is both liminal and marginal. Marginality appears to be part of a binary system, almost an 'us and them' situation; but liminality⁴ can never be constrained in this way. It is too elusive.

Camille sees marginal locations in cathedral or monastery as "the fringes where we find ejected forms, taboos sculpted in stone that seem to intensify the very desires they delimit" [Camille 1992: 9]. This would seem to contradict his earlier admission that he is more interested in how these images "pretend to avoid meaning" [*ibid.*]; how can they be taboo subjects if they seek to avoid meaning? One way is to break the taboo of keeping human form separate from animal – as some of the fantastic hybrid creatures demonstrate. However, this also illustrates how the whole arena of the grotesque and the marginal is fraught with problems of definition.

⁴ I look at Van Gennep's [1908] and Victor Turner's [1969] theories of liminality, and Caroline Walker Bynum's [1991 (1984)] critique of Turner's theory, in Chapter Four.

Kenaan-Kedar [1995] only looks at French sculpture of twelfth to sixteenth centuries, and that which she calls marginal is limited to corbels and gargoyles, which are located in the highest and most remote areas of buildings. She sees these representations as undeciphered images. She divides the sculpture into the 'marginal' and the 'official', which she sees as two completely different concepts in style and meaning. She sees marginal sculpture as "peripheral in its location but not in its choice of subjects ... It does not function as a frame to the official art ... Rather, in a multi-layered fashion, it is the antithesis of the official art" [Kenaan-Kedar 1995:5]. Thus, for Kenaan-Kedar, marginal (in location) sculpted imagery has metaphorical possibilities and a "style intentionally meant to question and to test the official artistic criteria" [*ibid.*].

Thus, it is apparent from these brief examples that notions of what constitutes 'marginal' or 'grotesque' in an assessment of Romanesque and Gothic sculpture are subject to personal interpretation. For Kenaan-Kedar, marginal means location, not subject matter. For Camille, it means both location and subject matter.

Are sheelas, therefore, to be viewed as part of marginal sculpture? In terms of subject matter and location, sheelas can be seen as marginal when looking at the image in Britain, as part of a corbel series, for example. But there are other examples in Britain where they are seemingly singled out for special treatment, as at Oaksey, Gloucestershire, or Binstead, Isle of Wight, where the image is not in a marginal location (although it may be classed as a liminal one, for example beside a window, as at Oaksey). In Ireland, this notion of marginality is even more strongly tested, where sheelas are quite often the only piece of sculpture to be found on a building, religious or secular. Thus, even if the sheela is difficult to see (because she is so high up, as is frequently the case on tower houses), as she is the only image she is not marginal; she is a main focus. Her image is intensified by contrast with the general starkness of the building. Where she is part of a corbel series, she is one image among many, some of which are wholly grotesque (as at Kilpeck, Herefordshire).

Thus, sheelas cannot easily be categorised as marginal in either location or subject matter.

Similarly, are sheelas to be seen as part of the grotesque? Much of the 'marginal' (in subject matter) imagery of the twelfth and later centuries can be seen in terms of the grotesque. But the term 'grotesque' is another that is not easy to define. I shall be exploring notions of the grotesque in a later chapter; suffice to say for now that the grotesque is a concept that allows for bizarre and strange imagery, that upsets concepts of the norm.

In some ways, therefore, sheelas can be seen as grotesque: some of them have hugely disproportionate heads to the rest of their bodies, or no necks, or a vulva that hangs down to the knees. But they are all recognisable as representations of the human female form. They are never represented as a hybrid creature, for example, or as something that is unrecognisable, that completely challenges the norm, as do many truly grotesque images. Sheelas, therefore, represent something else. But they have been placed in the category of the grotesque with other 'marginal' images, perhaps because no-one knew what else to do with them.

Sacred and profane

A final theme that I wish to highlight at this stage, that runs throughout sheela (and medieval sculptural) studies, is the division between the sacred and the profane. It is a theme that Van Gennep refers to as part of the notion of liminality, where a door would be a liminal zone between the profane (outside) and sacred (inside) of a religious building, for example, a temple. One criticism of using this notion of sacred and profane is the binary oppositions it sets up. As I put forward elsewhere in this thesis, the medieval world was not as fragmented as ours, and, therefore, such a division between sacred and profane does not work. In a recent lecture⁵, Michael Camille similarly pointed to the blending (as evidenced in wooden and stone sculpture of the cathedral and in the town) of so-called sacred and profane areas of the medieval town, referring in this case to Chartres.

⁵ 'The other Chartres: spinning pigs and smelly streets in the Middle Ages', 12 June 2001, Large Hall, Friends House, Euston Road, London. Reaktion Books in association with History Today magazine.

A more useful concept is perhaps that of a blending of the secular and sacred, for, unlike the modern western world, secular and sacred were not in opposition or separated in the Middle Ages.

In stark contrast to such a medieval view, I now present the analysis of my fieldwork research, which, in so doing, highlights how sheelas have been seen in the modern era – as distinct objects of study - rather than embedded in a variety of cultural contexts. However, in order to proceed with any understanding of possible meaning, such an objective analysis is necessary in order to arrive at some definition of the material. Otherwise we do not know what we are dealing with, confusion can result (for example, the incorrect identification of an image as a sheela such as that at Clonmacnois which is actually an acrobat or tumbler), and contextualisation then becomes meaningless.

CHAPTER TWO

Sheela-na-gig data: analysis

In this chapter I look at the data I have collected and analyse it for patterns of similarity and difference, locations, and relationships with other sculpture or features. One of the foci I have used for guidance in this analysis is what other authors have deemed to be important defining characteristics for sheelas. Previous authors tend to focus on these 'defining' characteristics as independent criteria, the presence of one or more such criteria for an image resulting in the label 'sheela-na-gig'. So, I firstly want to look at how this has happened, and raise the question: how do we know what a sheela-na-gig is?

Definition

Sheela-na-gigs are invariably not given a definition by the authors who write about them. They may devise typologies for their description, such as Guest's [1936], Hutchinson and Hutchinson's [1969], or Weir and Jerman's [1986], and in this way present a confusion of specific attributes which may be found associated with these images known as sheela-na-gigs. However, it is rare to find a definition. Most authors appear to make an assumption that the reader automatically 'knows' what a sheela is.

Even Andersen, who produced one of the key texts associated with sheela-na-gig study, does not provide a definition as such. He uses Lucie-Smith's [1972: 32] definition: "Basically the sheela may be described as 'a woman depicted with great emphasis on the vulva'" [1977: 120], and adds: "The basic attitude of a sheela implies concentrated reference to her sex ... significant gesture of the hands directed towards the lower abdomen ... concentrating the spectator's attention upon the vulva" [*ibid.*]. He nowhere gives us his own satisfactory definition, rather the odd comment such as the figure being "a displayed nude" [1977: 7], and he admits that "what is to be understood by a sheela has come to vary a great deal" [*ibid.*: 21]. It would seem that Andersen was not entirely sure what a sheela-na-gig was! He clearly emphasises the importance of the

displaying of the vulva, but that alone is not enough to denote a sheela. After all, other female exhibitionists also do this.

Cherry provides a seemingly more clear-cut definition. A sheela-na-gig is: “a medieval stone carving of a naked female exposing her genital area. A typical sheela has a large, bald head and a lean torso; breasts, when present, are usually small and ribs are sometimes indicated. Figures can be in a sitting or upright position with one or both hands indicating or clutching at the vulva” [1993: 107].

However, even this definition is not sufficient: the ‘typical’ sheela would seem to have a number of variants. Does she have breasts or not? Are ribs part of such a typical figure? Is she sitting or standing? Is there such a thing as a ‘typical’ sheela, and if not then how do we arrive at a definition? Which brings me back to the fundamental question: what is a sheela-na-gig? It seems to me that this question is actually incredibly difficult to answer, although it would seem that previous authors have made assumptions regarding the characteristics of sheelas. Through the analysis of the sheela-na-gig data I have collected during my fieldwork, I hope to be able to answer the question: ‘what is a sheela-na-gig?’, at least in terms of description, if not in meaning.

In terms of how I have arrived at what figures to record, I have used previous authors’ understandings (for example, Hutchinson & Hutchinson 1969) of what the figure constitutes iconographically, and earlier fieldwork sources. I have followed these earlier authors’ lists of sheelas for evaluation and recording in the field.

Previous authors [Guest 1936; Andersen 1977; Weir & Jerman 1986; Rynne 1987; Cherry 1992; Kelly 1995; Roberts 1995; McMahon and Roberts 2001] have used the following characteristics as a means of sheela-na-gig recognition:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1) an exposed and huge vulva | 6) small or non-existent breasts |
| 2) nakedness | 7) ‘ugliness’ or ‘grotesqueness’ |
| 3) arm position | |
| 4) leg position | |
| 5) baldness | |

Removing the last characteristic for its culture-specific aesthetic subjectivity, I would add the following as possible significant characteristics which I have identified as such through my observation in the field:

- 1) Ribs – present or absent?
- 2) Striation marks – associated with ribs present or not?
- 3) Eyes – emphasis on?
- 4) Belly – distended? Belly button present?
- 5) Size of head
- 6) Size of legs
- 7) Mouth – open, smiling or not?
- 8) Tongue – protruding or not shown?

The fieldwork data

The objective of my fieldwork was to record the greatest number of sheelas still in situ that I could feasibly visit given time constraints. My sample has been selected on the basis of geographic location, and by following the lists of sheelas as produced by Andersen [1977], Roberts [1995], and McMahon & Roberts [2001]. Thus, I have visited 41 images in Britain and 34 images in Ireland, some of which are definitely not sheelas and some of which are possible or definite new examples [see gazetteer]. One or two completely ex-situ examples (e.g. Llandrindod Wells) have been included to compare with those still in the field. I have thus visited slightly more than half of the sheelas currently known. This may be taken to be a representative sample, with the results of analysis being given as percentages. Thus, it is feasible to extrapolate from my results and apply them for all sheelas.

The characteristics of each image have been recorded and assimilated into charts that provide the basis for the analysis presented in this chapter. I have not included a distribution map because this would be meaningless as I have not visited all the sheelas. Thus, I have not included in my analysis any correlates for clustering of sheelas, such as positing the influence of regional schools of sculpture. Such an analysis would, however, be very useful, and would include the distribution pattern of sheelas in primary situ as well as those in secondary, and relating these to possible connections with regional schools of sculpture, whether British or Irish.

Not all sheelas have been included in the statistical analysis because I 'discovered' some figures (Devizes, Exeter cathedral and Rye) only after all the analysis had been carried out, but they are included in the gazetteer.

I broadly separate groupings for analysis into a) similarities, and b) differences [Tables A & B, p.23], comparing sheelas in Britain and Ireland. The basis for my differentiation between Britain and Ireland is that (as shown in Chapter Three) previous authors often group all sheela-na-gigs together. I wanted to test this to see if there are distinct differences and/or similarities between the two geographical areas.

Based upon statistical results of my analysis, at the end of this chapter I provide a gradation of primary, secondary, and tertiary characteristics for sheela-na-gig definition. However, as will be seen, even this is not conclusively definitive.

Nakedness

All sheelas that I have recorded are naked. However, this on its own of course does not signify a sheela-na-gig. However, when compared with other so-called exhibitionists, it becomes a significant factor, as most of these other images are not fully naked as sheelas are.

Vulva

The presence of a vulva is clearly an important characteristic for sheela classification. 81% of sheelas for Britain and 78% for Ireland are clearly showing their vulvas [Fig. 1 a&b]. Of those sheelas showing their vulvas, 55% for Britain and 60% for Ireland also have their fingers going into the vulva [Fig. 1 e&f]. These two characteristics, then, are closely linked, with the likely intention of drawing attention, or giving heightened significance, to the vulva. However, there is a significant difference between the two regions for sheelas displaying a disproportionately large vulva. Of sheelas showing their vulvas, 68% are disproportionately large for Britain, but only 36% are for Ireland [Fig. 1 c&d]. This statistic refutes the claim made by many authors on this subject that sheelas often have huge vulvas. It is clearly true for sheelas in Britain but not so for Irish figures.

Anus

There is a marked difference between Britain and Ireland regarding display of the anus, with only 7% doing so in Britain while 31% do so in Ireland [**Fig. 1 g&h**]. There is no general association for both anus and distended belly being shown, with only 4% doing so for Britain and 9% for Ireland [**Fig. 2 g&h**]. Of course, for those that do, the implication might be a child-birth scenario, but this cannot be a significant factor when applied across all sheelas.

Breasts

Despite claims by some authors [Murray 1934: 97; Ashdown 1993: 72; McMahon & Roberts 2001: 12, 83, 94] that sheelas often do not have breasts, my statistics prove otherwise. Whilst there is a difference in the proportion for British and Irish examples (44% and 63% respectively, **Fig. 2 a&b**), this represents a significant number of sheelas that do actually have breasts present. This means, for all sheelas, at least half of them have breasts, and for Ireland nearly two-thirds do.

Round breasts are equally found for British (30%) and Irish (34%) sheelas [**Fig. 2 c&d**], but pendulous breasts are significantly greater in Ireland (31%) than in Britain (11%). British sheelas, however, have a greater percentage of breasts represented under the arms (22%) than Irish examples (13%).

Belly button and distended belly

A quarter of sheelas in Britain (26%) and nearly half of sheelas in Ireland (44%) display a distended belly [**Fig. 2 e&f**]. Similar percentages are found for Britain (22%) for the belly button being present [**Fig. 3 a&b**], but less similar for Ireland (31%). These two characteristics when taken individually suggest that both the belly button and the distended belly are more significant for Ireland than Britain. When looked at as conjoined characteristics [**Fig. 3 e&f**], it is very evident that they are significantly more important for Ireland (19% of all sheelas) than for Britain (7%). Even looked at in the context of all sheelas with distended bellies, those which have both characteristics represented equate to 29% for Britain and 43% for Ireland [**Fig. 3 c&d**].

Thus, whether as single or conjoined characteristics, belly button and distended belly are more highly significant features for sheelas in Ireland than in Britain.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

Ribs and/or striation marks

The presence or not of ribs and/or striation marks have been highlighted by authors [Andersen 1977: 84-87; McMahon & Roberts 2001: 68, 91-94] as peculiarly meaningful characteristics, enhancing the 'grotesqueness' of the image, as a 'hag-like' quality, and viewed as representing emaciation or tattoo-like scarification. In actual fact, the numbers that have these characteristics are low. 82% of sheelas in Britain and 62% in Ireland [Fig. 3 g&h] do not have either of these characteristics. However, an interesting difference is that no British sheelas have ribs only showing, whereas 16% of Irish sheelas do. In addition, only 7% of British sheelas show ribs and striation marks, as opposed to 19% for Irish sheelas; striation marks only are broadly similar for both regions (7% Britain, 3% Ireland).

Another significant difference is that only 7% of British but 19% of Irish sheelas have a distended belly as well as ribs or striation marks [Fig. 4 a&b]. These are represented in different images from those showing both ribs and striation marks. If distended belly is taken as a possible indicator of pregnancy or childbirth, then emaciation cannot be the reason for ribs being shown. Striation marks could be interpreted as a sculptural means of indicating extreme pain, however, particularly when indicated on the face and neck areas, demonstrated by sheelas at Fethard town wall and Taghmon, for example.

Neck

Significantly more sheelas in Ireland (41%) than in Britain (22%) have a neck represented. Part of the reason for this is that a higher number of sheelas in Britain have their heads sitting directly upon their torso, suggesting a hunched position. This cannot only be due to the 'squatting legs wide apart' position of the figure, as nearly as many sheelas in Ireland are also in this position [see below: 'Leg position'].

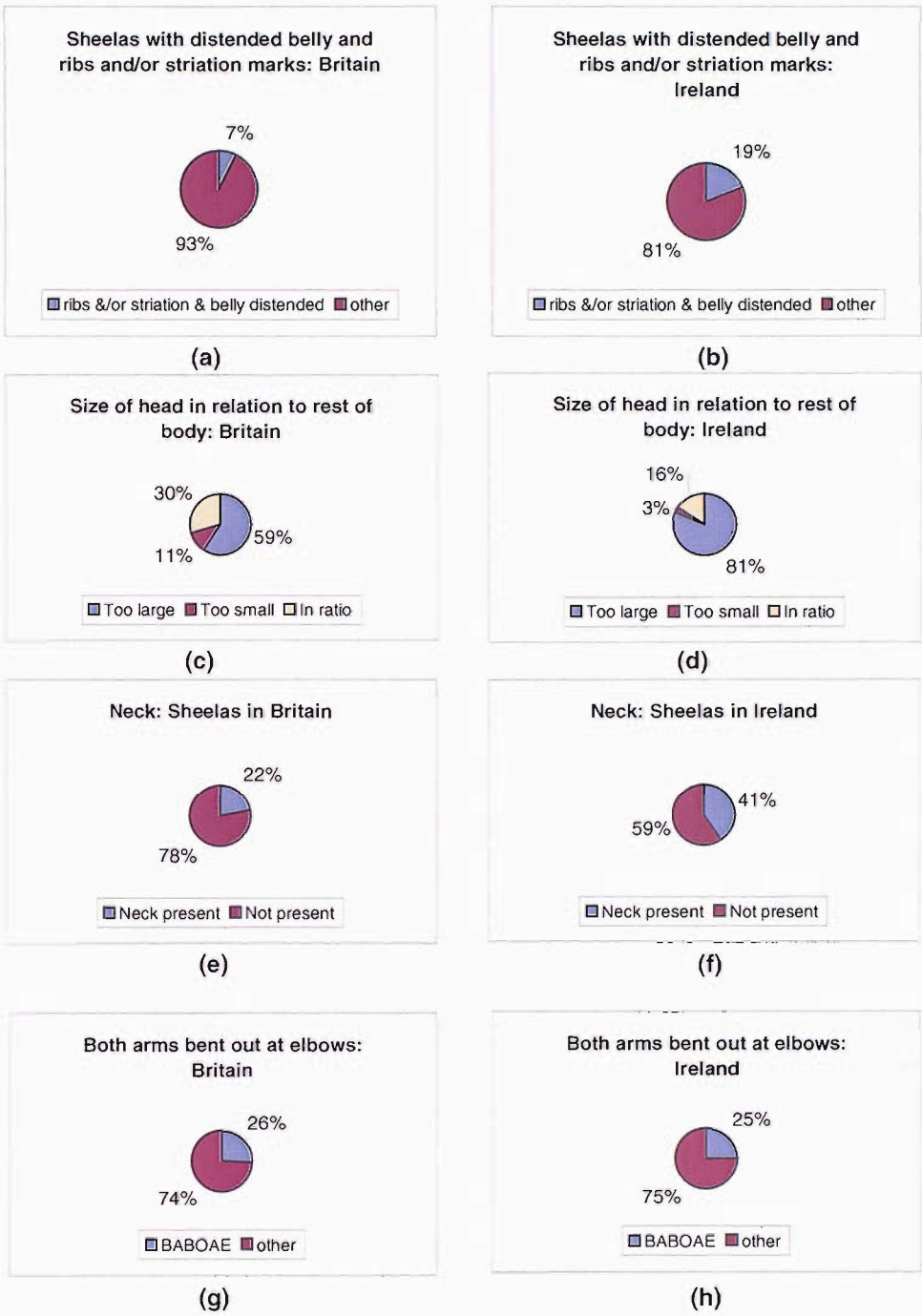


FIGURE 4

Table A: Similarities

	Characteristic	Britain %	Ireland %	Chart reference
1	Sheelas showing vulva	81	78	1 a & b
2	Fingers in vulva	55	60	1 e & f
3	Round breasts	30	34	2 c & d
4	Both arms bent out at elbows	26	25	4 e & f
5	Small legs in relation to rest of body	41	46	5 c & d
6	Hands round knees	4	6	5 e & f
7	Arms too small	4	9	5 a & b
8	Both arms in front of body	29	32	6 a & b
8	Both arms behind body	19	22	6 a & b
10	Squatting position, legs wide apart	43	39	6 c & d
11	Large & almond-shaped eyes	26	25	8 a & b
12	Almond-shaped eyes	30	31	8 c & d
13	Mouth open	44	50	9 a & b
14	Tongue not shown	96	94	9 e & f
15	Presence of nostrils	35	32	10 e & f
16	Carved in relief	89	88	11 e & f
17	Sheelas above/next to door	33	33	14 c & d
18	Exterior location	67	76	14 e & f
19	In primary situ	44	45	15 a & b
20	On S wall	41	31	16 a & b
21	On W wall	11	13	16 a & b

Table B: Differences

	Characteristic	Britain %	Ireland %	Chart reference
1	Disproportionately large vulva	68	36	1 c & d
2	Anus shown	7	31	1 e & f
3	Breasts present	44	63	2 a & b
4	Pendulous breasts	11	31	2 c & d
5	Breasts shown under arms	22	13	2 c & d
6	Distended belly	26	44	2 e & f
7	Ribs only	0	16	3 g & h
8	Striation marks and ribs	7	19	3 g & h
9	Head too large	59	81	4 a & b
10	Head in ratio	30	16	4 a & b
11	Neck present	22	41	4 c & d
12	Arms too large	56	34	5 a & b
13	Arms in ratio	33	51	5 a & b
14	Furrowed brow lines	11	25	8 g & h
15	Teeth shown	4	13	9 c & d
16	Mouth shown as straight line	34	50	10 a & b
17	'Celtic' ears (where ears present)	25	69	11 a & b
18	Hair present	26	6	11 c & d
19	With associated patterns/objects	41	22	12 a & b
20	Sheelas on a corbel	19	0	14 a
21	Sheelas on a quoin and horizontal	0	19	14 b
22	Above/next to door and window	7	0	14 c
23	Above/next to window	19	6	14 c & d
24	Sheelas on churches	93	30	15 c & d
25	Sheelas on N wall	37	9	16 a & b
26	Sheelas on E wall	0	28	16 a & b



FIGURE 5

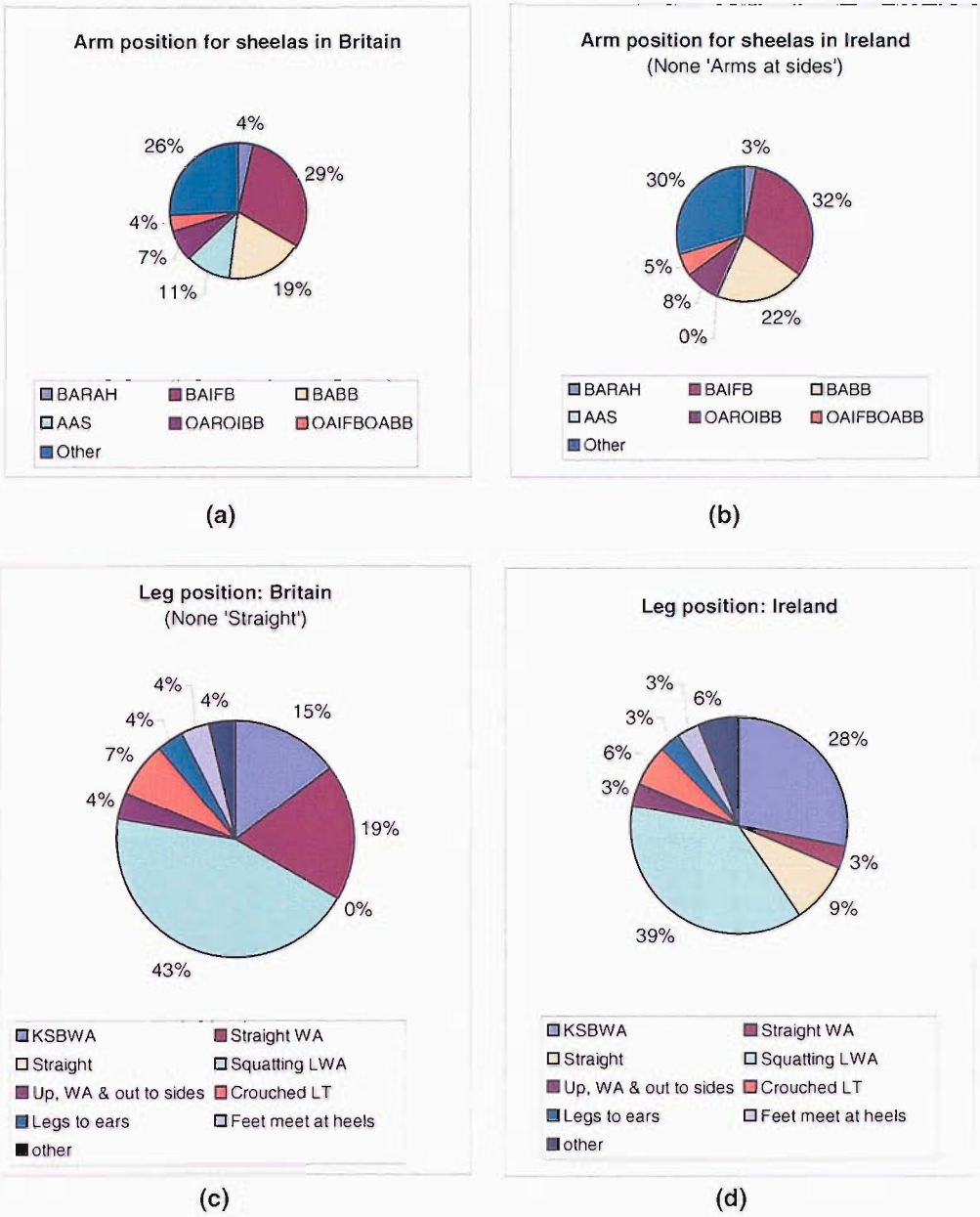


FIGURE 6

KSBWA= knees slightly bent wide apart

LWA= legs wide apart

LT= legs together

BARAH= both arms raised above head

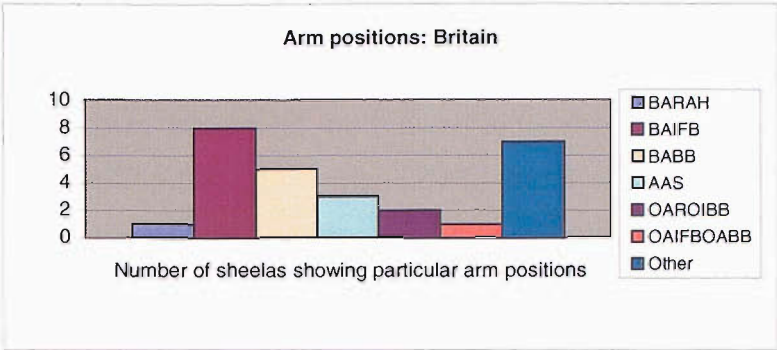
BAIFB= both arms in front of body

BABB= both arms behind body

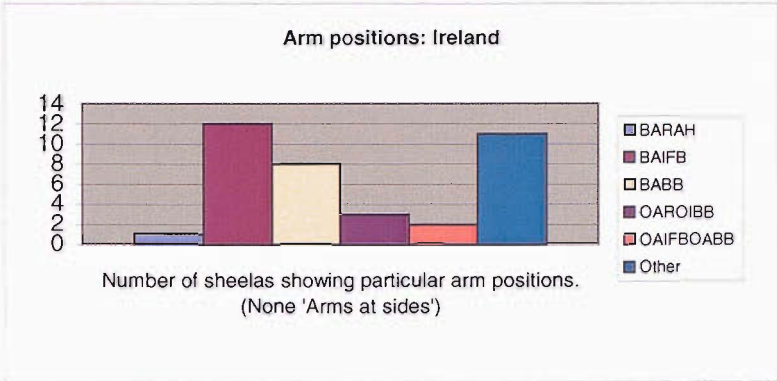
AAS= arms at sides

OAROIBB= one arm raised
one in front or behind body

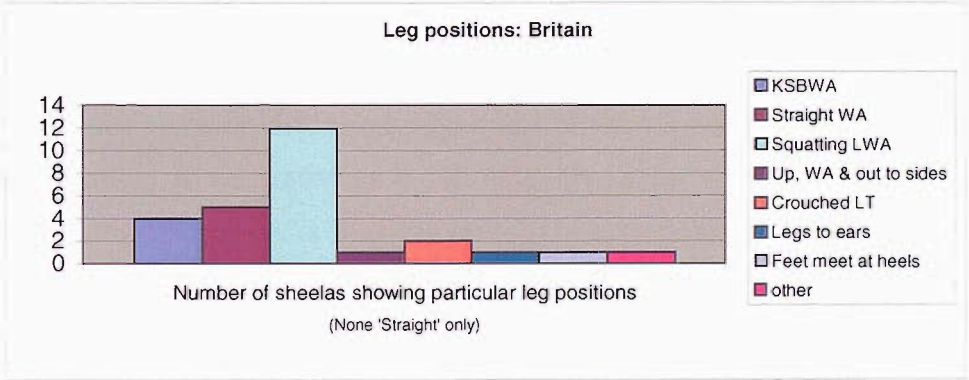
OAIFBOABB= one arm in front of
body one arm behind body



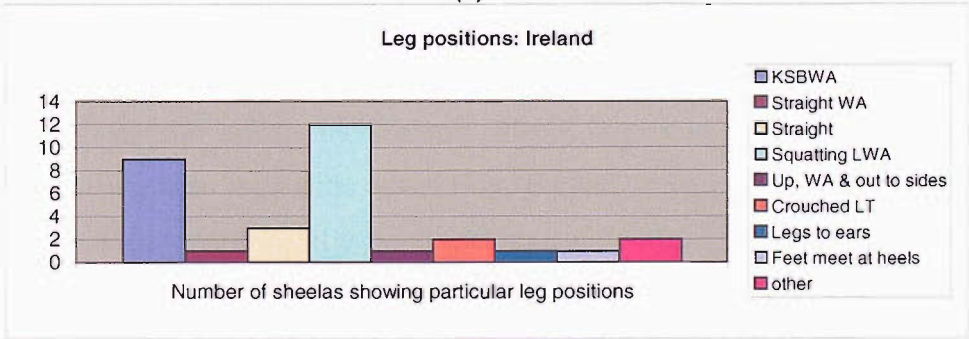
(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

FIGURE 7

See Fig. 6 for Legend

Arm position

Arm position has been viewed by some earlier authors (particularly Guest, whose typology has been influential on later researchers' understandings of what a sheela is) as an important characteristic for sheela definition. However, my analysis shows that whilst 'both arms in front of the body' is the largest category for arm position for both British [29%] and Irish [32%] examples [**Fig 6 a&b**], both regions also have nearly as many examples that do not conform to any of the categories of arm position that Guest or myself have devised. In addition, both regions have the same percentage of sheelas (26% Britain, 25% Ireland, **Fig. 4 g&h**) with both arms bent out at the elbows. However, some sheelas have both arms bent out at the elbows as well as both arms going behind or in front of the body. This, therefore, suggests that single criterion arm position is not a defining characteristic of a sheela-na-gig. The most one can say is that a significant number of sheelas have either both arms in front of the body or both arms behind the body, for Britain 48% and for Ireland 54%, and that a quarter of all sheelas have both arms bent out at the elbows. All other arm positions are not particularly significant when applied across all sheelas.

Thus, there are three arm positions that are significant (both arms in front of the body, both arms behind the body, and both arms bent out at elbows), but none individually can be stated as a definitive characteristic of a sheela. A significant observation, however, is that the *pattern* of arm positions is very similar for both regions [**Fig 7 a&b**], although Ireland has no examples with both arms at the sides.

The pattern for leg position, by contrast [**Fig 7 c&d**], is quite different.

Leg position

For both Britain [43%] and Ireland [39%], the most common leg position is that of squatting with legs wide apart [**Fig. 6 c&d**]. If you add to this figure those sheelas with knees slightly bent and legs wide apart, the percentages rise to 58% for Britain, and 67% for Ireland. A difference for leg position is that of straight legs but wide apart, with Britain having 19% for this and Ireland only 3%. Added to the other figures, however, the result is 77% for Britain and 70% for Ireland of all sheelas having their legs wide apart, which is a highly significant percentage.

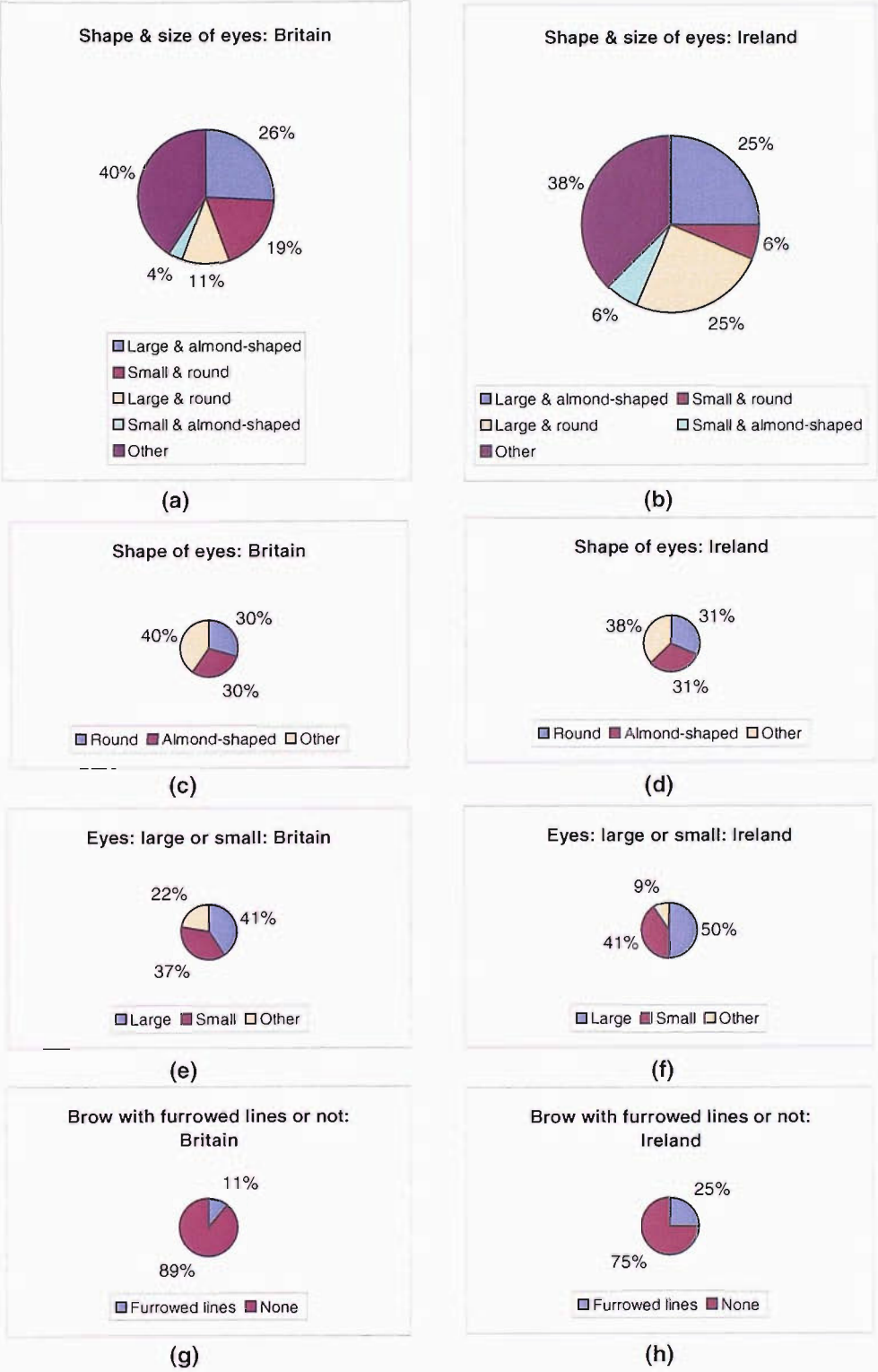


FIGURE 8

Size of arms and size of legs

'Small arms' in relation to the rest of the body is not a typical sheela characteristic, with only 4% in Britain and 9% in Ireland demonstrating this [**Fig. 5 a&b**]. 'Large arms' are significantly more common in Britain (56%) than in Ireland (34%), whilst the reverse is true for 'arms in ratio' (33% for Britain and 51% for Ireland).

'Small legs', however, can be seen as a common characteristic, with 41% for Britain and 46% for Ireland [**Fig. 5 c&d**]. 'In ratio' legs are more common in Britain (37%) than in Ireland (25%).

Britain tends to have sheelas with arms that are too large and legs that are either too small or in ratio. Ireland tends to have sheelas with arms that are mainly in ratio and a significant number that are too large, and legs that are mainly too small but with a significant number that are in ratio.

Thus, the significant characteristic is that just under half of all sheelas have legs that are too small in relation to the rest of the body.

Eyes

A quarter of all sheelas have eyes that are large and almond-shaped [**Fig. 8 a&b**]. However, there is a difference between Britain and Ireland for other categories. Small and round eyes are more common in Britain (19%) than Ireland (6%), and large and round eyes are more common in Ireland (25%) than Britain (11%). This means that for Ireland, largeness is the important characteristic, with 50% of all sheelas having large eyes [**Fig. 8 f**]. Size of eye is clearly more important in denoting difference between British and Irish examples than shape of eye, for shape of eye is the same for both regions [**Fig. 8 c&d**]. However, although the greater proportion of all sheelas have large eyes, the proportion for small eyes is not a great deal less [**Fig. 8 e&f**].

Nonetheless, as almost half of all sheelas have large eyes, and a quarter have large and almond-shaped eyes, this lends support to my assertion that eyes are significant for sheelas in demonstrating an apotropaic / evil eye link.

Mouth

There may be some significance in the mouth being open for all sheelas, with 44% in Britain and 50% in Ireland demonstrating this [**Fig. 9 a&b**]. The presence

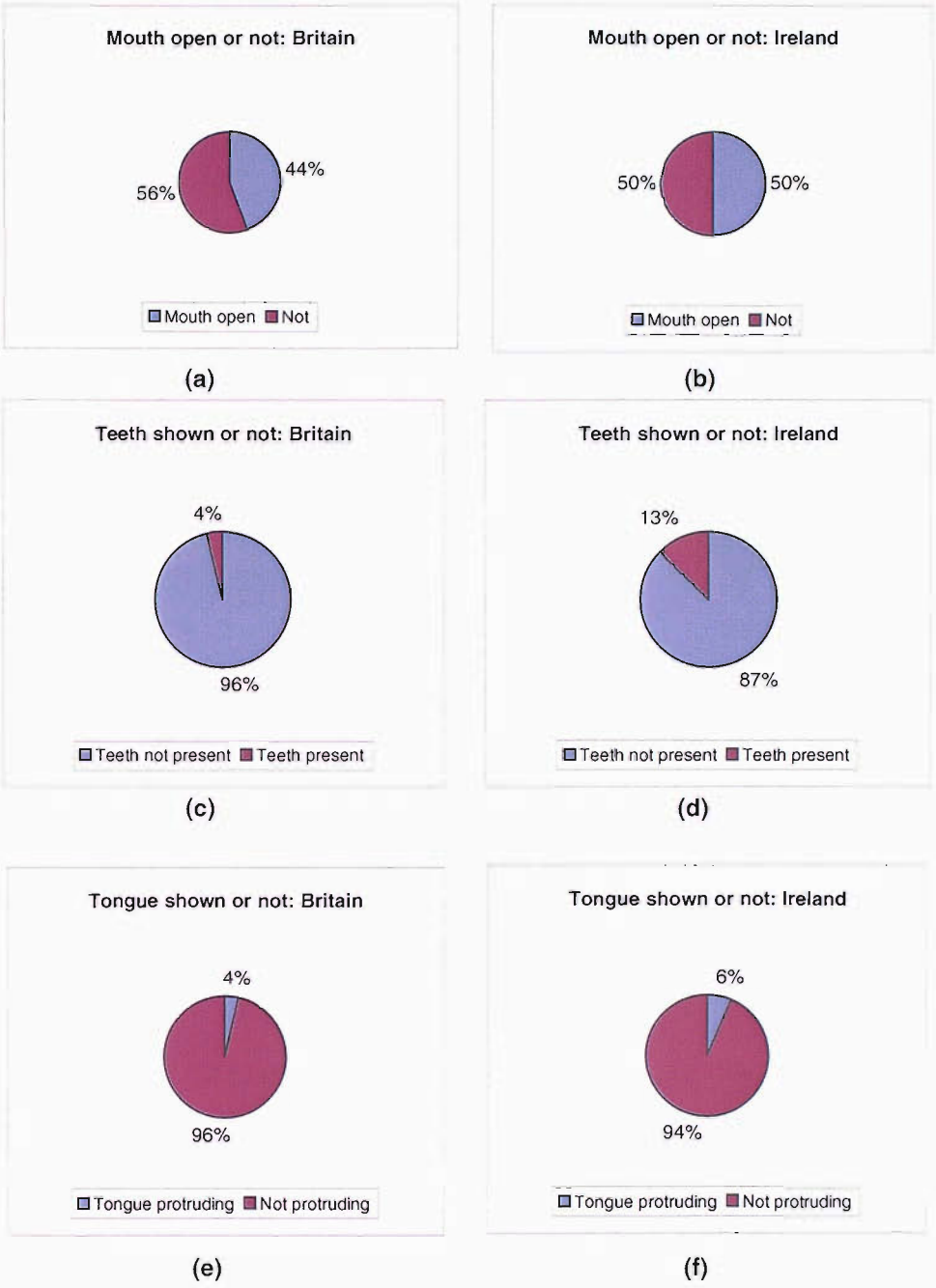


FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

of teeth, however, does not appear to have any great significance (4% Britain, 13% Ireland) [Fig. 9 c&d], nor the presence of the tongue (4% Britain, 6% Ireland) [Fig. 9 e &f]. There is a significant difference between sheelas in Britain and Ireland for mouth shape, however. 50% of sheelas in Ireland have a straight line shape, 22% are smiling, and 9% are down-turned [Fig. 10 b]. Over half of the sheelas with open mouths in Ireland also are shown as a straight line. For Britain, the images have equal numbers of straight line or smiling or some other shape for the mouth [Fig. 10 a]. This means there are more shown smiling in Britain than in Ireland.

Nose

85% of sheelas in Britain and 97% in Ireland have a nose represented [Fig. 10 c&d]. More sheelas in Britain (36%) than Ireland (25%) have triangular-shaped noses, and also for Britain this is the largest category for nose shape [Fig. 10 c&d]. Oblong nose shape is about the same for both regions, but the largest difference is that for Ireland 56% of sheelas have neither triangular nor oblong shaped noses, but some other shape. So, whilst the triangular shaped nose is a significant characteristic for sheelas generally, it is most significant for those in Britain, and not particularly so for those in Ireland. 15% of sheelas in Britain but only 3% in Ireland do not have a nose represented at all, yet the percentages for both regions for the presence of nostrils are very similar: 35% Britain, 32% Ireland [Fig. 10 e&f]. This must mean that many more sheelas in Ireland do not have nostrils shown even though they do have noses.

Ears

Most sheelas do not have ears represented: 71% Britain, 59% Ireland [Fig. 10 g&h]. Of those with ears, a very revealing difference is that whilst only 25% of sheelas in Britain have 'Celtic' style ears [i.e. semi-circular, non-naturalistic], 69% do so in Ireland. This statistic may help justify my suggestions that sheela styles may have moved from west to east, that is from Ireland to Britain, rather than the other way as is the usual presented notion. It may be that the 'Celtic' style ear demonstrates that some (possibly earlier) sheelas in Britain were derived from Irish sheelas. Equally, there may have been a mixture of development of styles, some insular, some exported, some imported. But this still supports the suggestion that some sheela characteristics may have moved

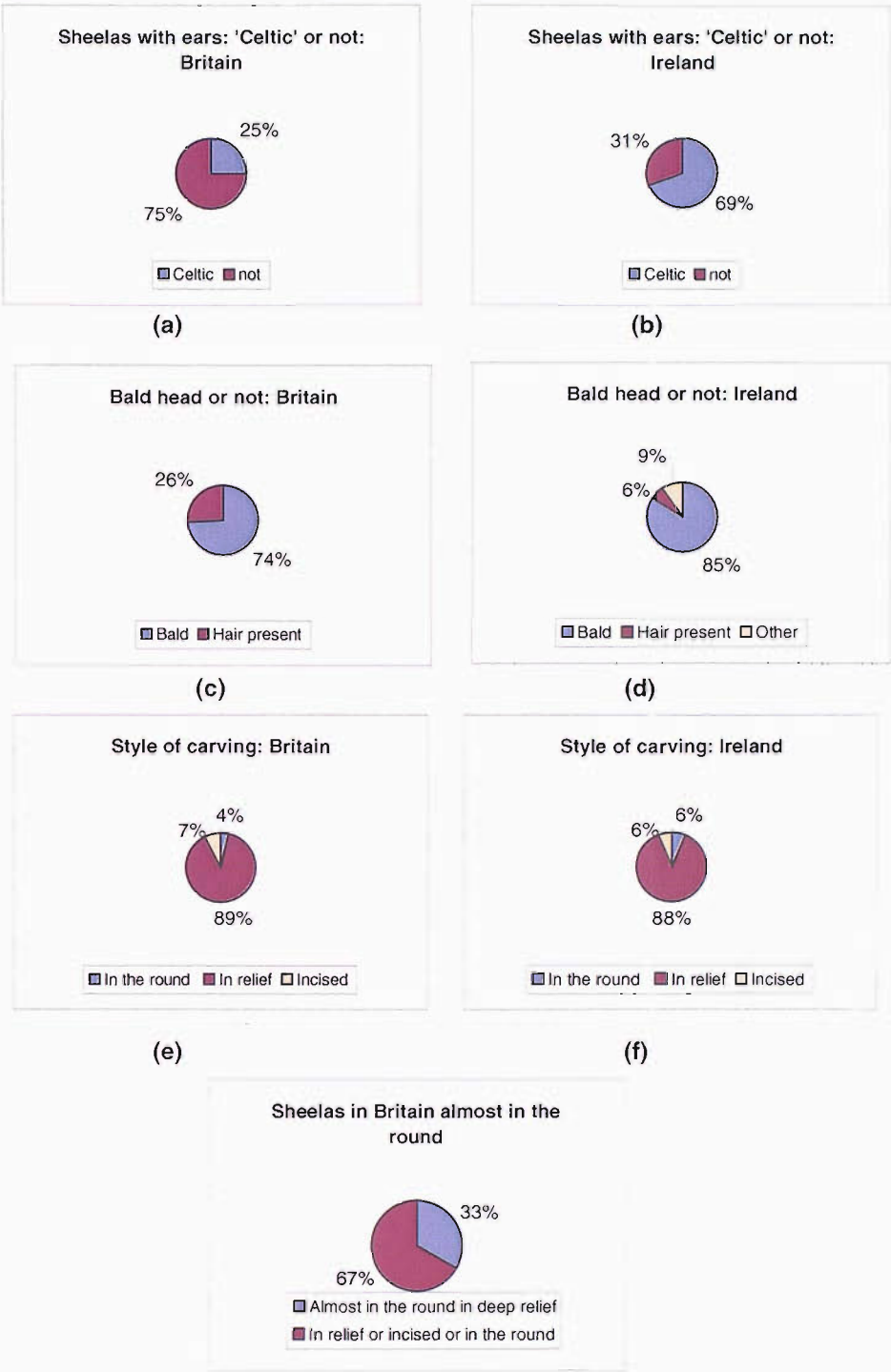


FIGURE 11

from Ireland to Britain. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that some Irish-produced sheelas may have been imported and reused on British churches, the sheela at Oaksey, Wiltshire being a possible example of this.

Head

For both Britain and Ireland a significant number of sheelas have heads that are too large in relation to the rest of the body: 59% Britain, 81% Ireland [**Fig. 4 c&d**]. However, Britain also has nearly a third of sheelas (30%) with heads in ratio, twice as many as Ireland (16%). The head being too small is not a typical sheela characteristic: 11% for Britain and only 3% for Ireland.

Clearly the head is a highly significant part of the representation, more so for Ireland. Each sheela's face is highly individualised. The size of the head, perhaps, is related to this, enabling greater area for features to be sculpted. The head, of course, also is of great significance within Romano-Celtic ideology and iconography [see: Jackson 1973, and Ross 1992: 94-171].

Baldness

The greater percentage of all sheelas do have bald heads: 74% Britain, 85% Ireland [**Fig. 11 c&d**]. However, another highly significant characteristic is that 26% of sheelas in Britain have hair, but only 6% in Ireland do so. The presence of hair, especially long hair, has been implied as a later development for sheelas [see Weir & Jerman 1986: 27, referring to Irish exhibitionist figures, and the Ballinderry castle sheela in particular]. However, this suggests a continuum of 'development' with baldness signifying the more 'basic' form of the image. I think we need to get away from such notions of 'progression' from a simple to a more complex or refined version of the image. As most sheelas in Ireland are bald, including late examples in primary situ, the validity of such a notion cannot be upheld. In Britain the situation is more complicated because sheelas in primary situ may not be of the same date as the earliest date for the extant building, such as the sheela at St Helena's, Austerfield, which is a twelfth century church. The sheela has hair, is in primary situ but, stylistically and because she is on a post-Norman capital, cannot be twelfth century. There are no sheelas in Britain with hair that are in primary situ that are not later examples. If we were to draw a conclusion about the difference between Britain and Ireland for presence or not of hair, we might be tempted to say that if baldness were an

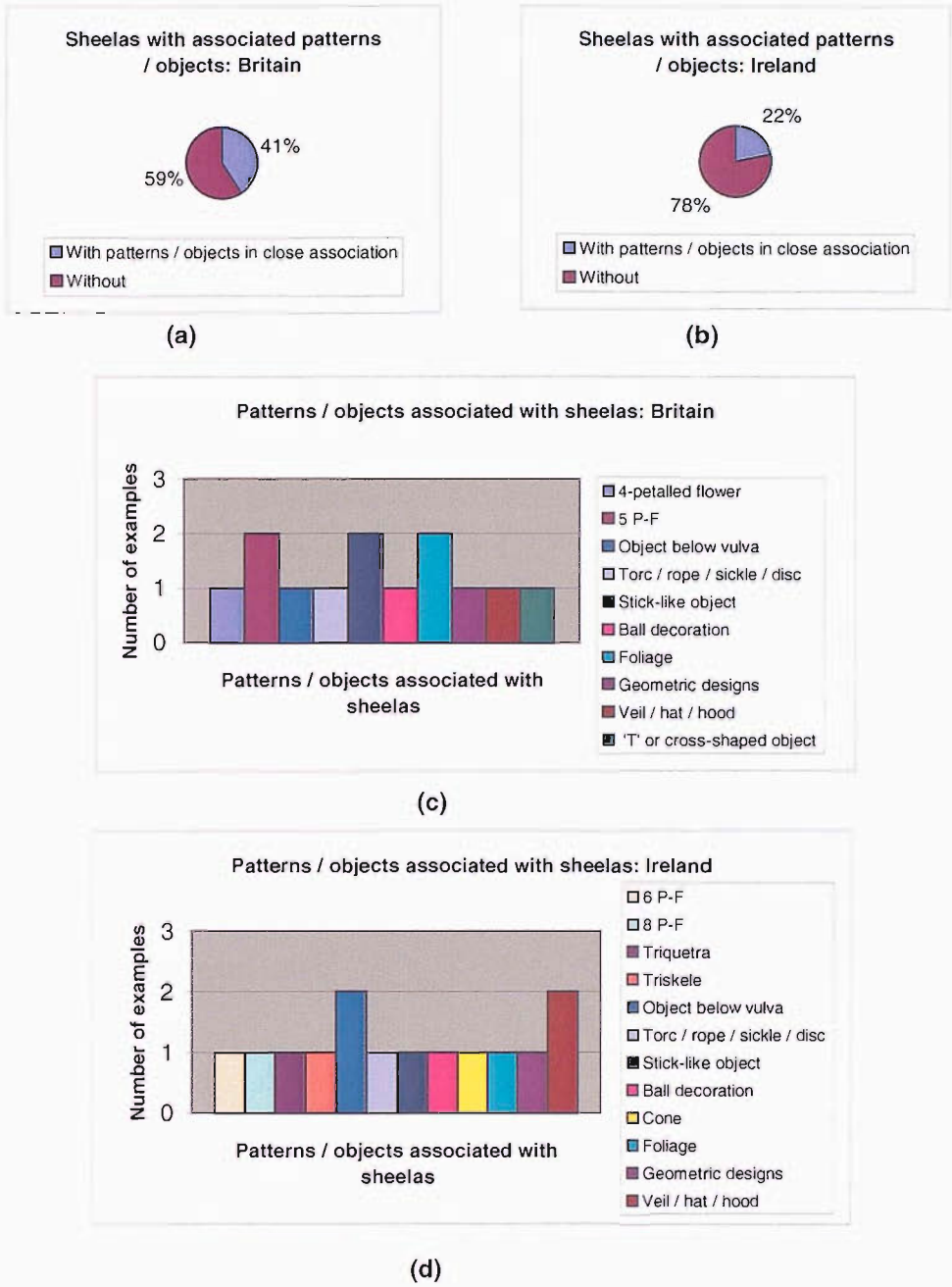


FIGURE 12

indicator of an earlier style of sheela representation, then there are a greater number of later sheelas in Britain and perhaps this is as a result of a west-to-east move in the motif? But only 6% of sheelas in Ireland have hair (or what is assumed to be hair) at all, and most sheelas in Ireland are of a post-twelfth century date, with the largest clustered around a sixteenth to seventeenth century date, whereas for Britain most sheelas date to an earlier period, especially twelfth century. So, baldness / presence of hair does not correlate with an early / late parallel. The issue of baldness or presence of hair and/or head-dress is a highly significant feature of sheela-na-gig analysis, and one that I need to investigate in much greater depth for a future article.

Style of carving

The vast majority of all sheelas are carved in relief, 89% Britain, 88% Ireland [Fig. 11 e&f]. However, a difference is that 33% in Britain [Fig. 11 g] although carved in deep relief are actually almost carved in the round. In sculptural chronology, this is usually taken to indicate a later date with earlier work being more linearly or shallowly carved [see Gardner 1951: 95; Zarnecki 1953: 51; Stalley 1971: 2-3, 64]. In Ireland, only 6% are carved in the round. Again, I posit that this may lend support to my idea of sheelas in Ireland developing quite differently to those in Britain, with sheela styles in Ireland possibly influencing some of the British examples.

Association of patterns /objects

Some authors (in particular Roberts 1995: 13; McMahon & Roberts 2001: 95-97; 99) give especial significance to the presence of patterns and/or objects in association with a sheela image. For Britain, a significant number (44%) do have such associations, but only 22% do so for Ireland [Fig. 12 a&b]. If we look at the actual imagery of these patterns / objects [Fig. 12 c&d], it is clear that there is a vast range of categories, and as such the nature of each category is of little significance when applied across all sheelas. In other words, it is not possible to generalise from these associations for all sheelas.

For individual images, however, there may be very strong symbolism attached, the meaning of which is now lost. This point is in itself significant in supporting my notion that although there are some characteristics that enable a definition of 'sheela-na-gig' to be made, there are also significant categories that are so

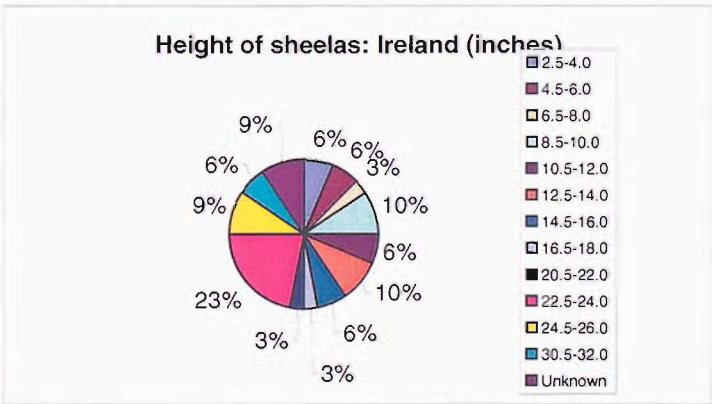
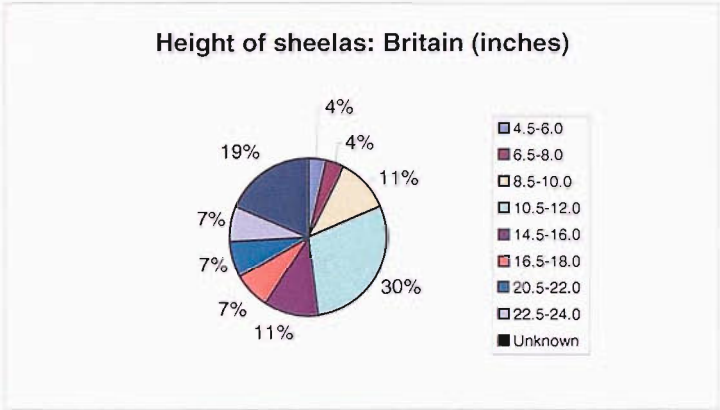
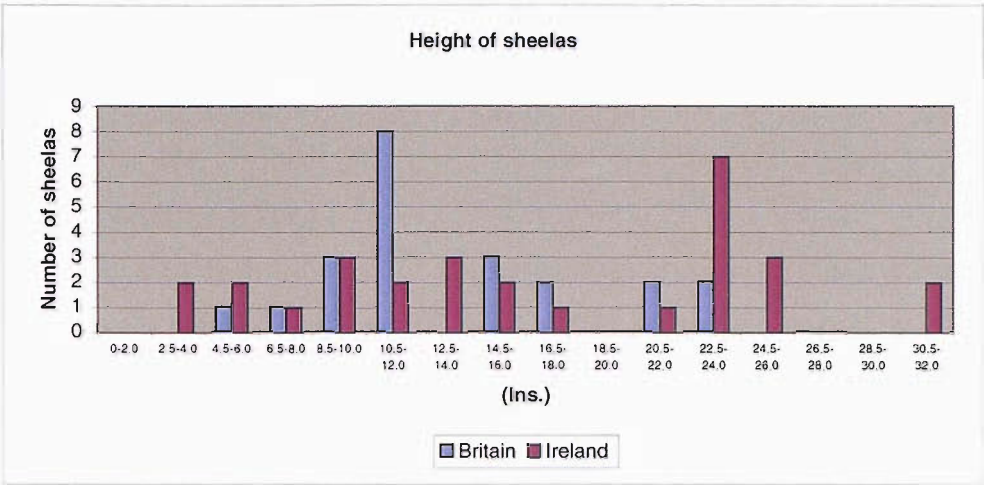


FIGURE 13

disparate in their variance that the conclusion I make is that sheelas have to be seen as individual images, with individual meanings attached for each image. Some images may also be part of a wider concept (such as the evil eye), but they are still individual representations – not produced using a specific or universal set of criteria.

Size and architectural type

There is quite clearly a difference between Britain and Ireland for the most common size (height) of sheelas: 10.5-12 inches for Britain and 22.5-24 inches for Ireland [Fig. 13 a]. This represents 30% of British sheelas and 23% of the Irish examples. For Britain, this cannot just be due to a sheela being a corbel figure, which might be construed as the most likely correlate for these heights, because only 19% of British sheelas are corbels. However, the correlation works well for Irish sheelas as 22% are on quoins [Fig. 14 a&b]. So, for Britain the size of the sheela is affected by something other than architectural fit.

It also seems significant that 19% of sheelas in Britain are corbels and 19% in Ireland are horizontal quoins. It is almost as though these two types of architectural feature are functioning in the same way for the two regions as sheela-containing devices. However, it should also be noted that most sheelas for both Britain (63%) and Ireland (69%) are something other than corbel, quoin, or voussoir.

Sheela position

33% of sheelas in both Britain and Ireland [Fig. 14 c&d] are found placed next to or above a door. But this is the only common feature, for only 6% of Irish sheelas are above or next to a window, whereas 19% of British ones are, and 7% of British examples are above or next to a door and a window, whereas no Irish examples are. This statistic supports the notion that doorways and windows might be significant in their relationship with sheela placement in Britain, but only doorways appear to be so for those in Ireland. With 61% of Irish sheelas not being placed in either of these categories, it calls into question the idea of the dominance of doorway and/or window placement for sheelas. For Britain, the argument can perhaps be upheld more as only 41% of sheelas are not in these categories. The significance of this finding must be related to the fact that 93% of sheelas in Britain are on churches, whereas only 30% are in Ireland [Fig. 15



FIGURE 14

c&d]. Sacredness of space (clearly an important aspect of a church) is delineated by this division between the outer and the inner of the building, with doorways and windows representing an in-between state neither holy nor secular. But as 37% of Irish sheelas are found on tower houses (secular buildings), and some of these have sheelas above or next to doorways, the liminality theory perhaps does not apply in quite the same way. However, an apotropaic theory can be seen to work for both church and secular placement, but perhaps for differing reasons, as I discuss in Chapter Four.

One similarity that is irrefutable for both Britain and Ireland is that most sheelas are found on the exterior of a building: 67% Britain, 76% Ireland. As nearly half of all sheelas are in primary situ [**Fig. 15 a&b**], this statistic becomes even more significant. We can say confidently that sheelas were most likely to be placed on the exterior of a building, quite possibly for apotropaic and sacred reasons (see Chapter Four).

Location on buildings

There is a significant difference in directional location for sheelas in Britain or Ireland. Contrary to the commonly held belief (see, for example, comments for Copgrove) that the north wall is a typical place to find a sheela in Britain, in actual fact more are found on the S wall (41%) [**Fig. 16 a&b**]. However, the north wall is still significant with 37% of sheelas being placed there. In Ireland, the north wall is not significant at all (9%), but the south wall, again, is (31%), as is the east wall (28%). There are no sheelas on an east wall at all in Britain. Thus, the south wall is the most significant location for all sheelas, with the east wall for Ireland and north wall for Britain perhaps having some corresponding significance [**Fig. 16 c**].

For sheelas on churches, there is a large difference between Britain and Ireland in terms of location, with the chancel being the most common place for Britain, and the nave for Ireland [**Fig. 17 a&b**]. It has to be remembered that this is far more significant for the British examples, where 93% of sheelas are on churches, and of this 93% a good number are found in the chancel, the holiest place of the church.

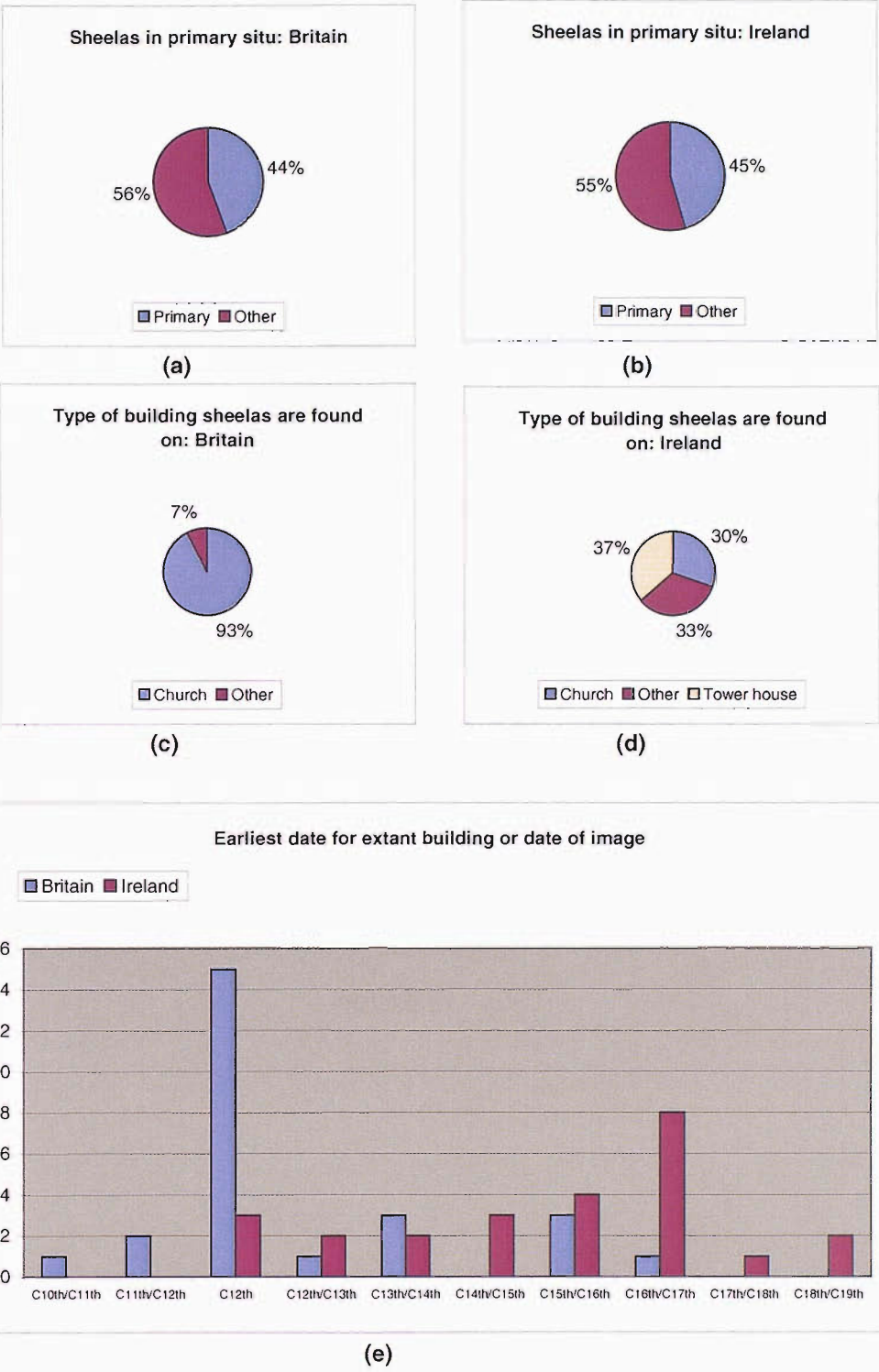
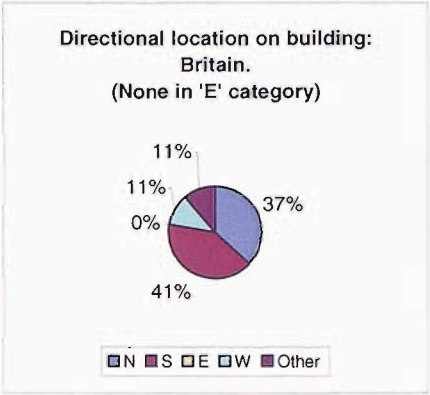
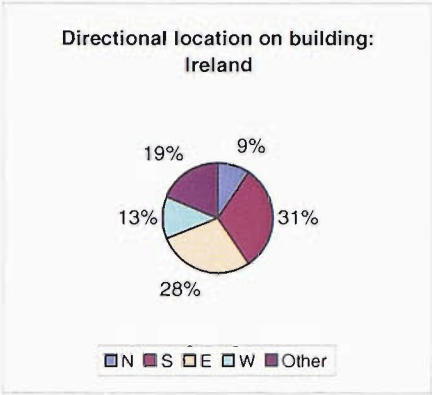


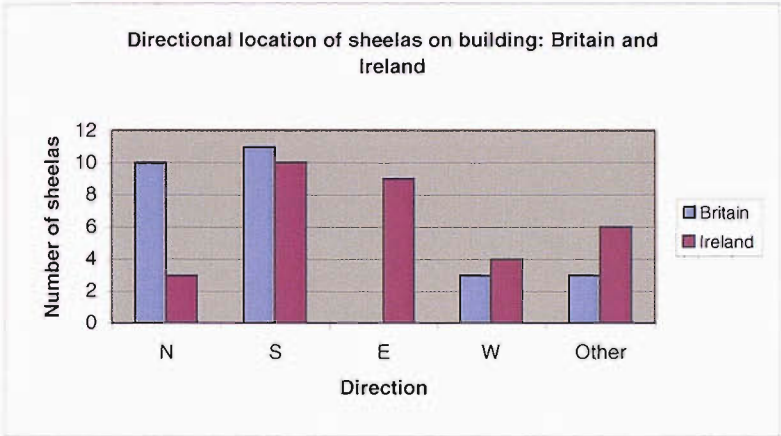
FIGURE 15



a)



(b)

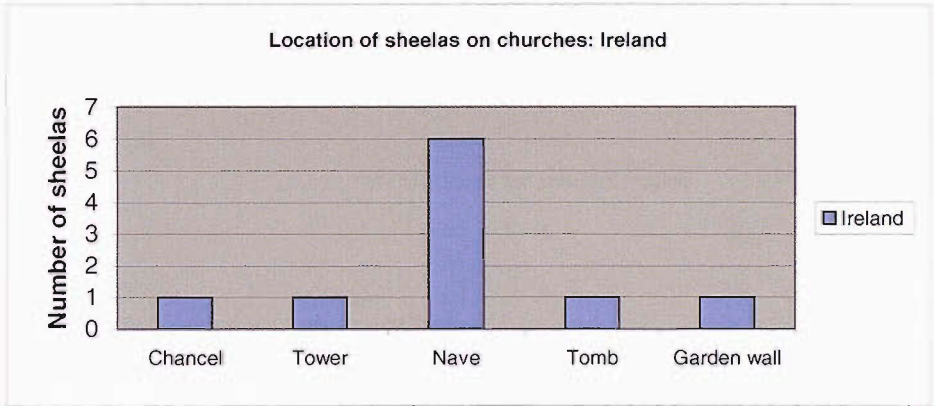


(c)

FIGURE 16

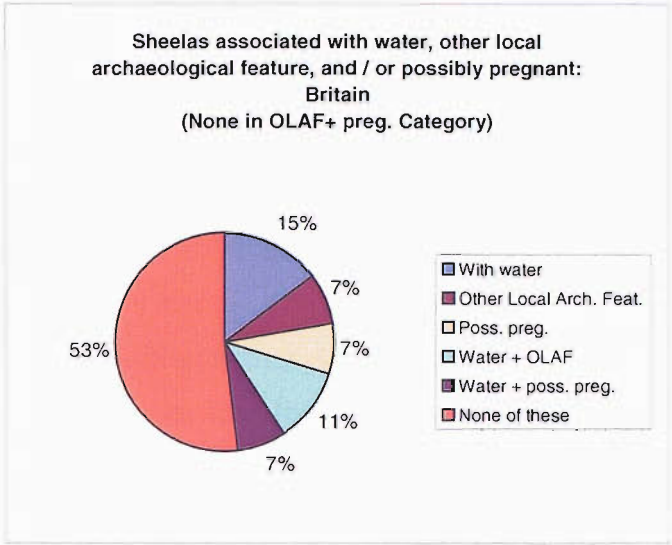


(a)

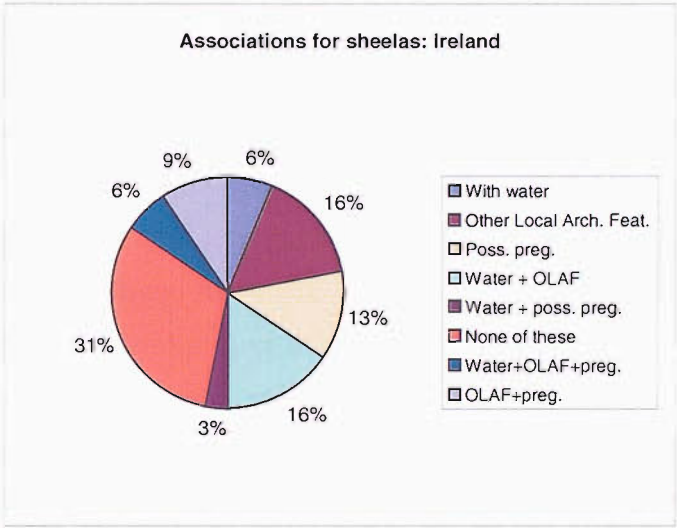


(b)

FIGURE 17



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 18

Connections with water or local archaeological features

The literature makes reference to the significance of sheelas being placed in locations where there are natural springs or wells [McMahon and Roberts 2001: 79, for example]. The percentages for all of these figures being associated with natural water of some description [**Fig. 18 a&b**], 33% of sheelas in Britain have a water connection, and 31% in Ireland. This, however, includes figures that I do not classify as sheelas, such as Castlemagner and Ballyvourney. For Ireland, there is only one associated with natural springs that I consider to be a sheela (Abbeylara). The other water connections are mainly rivers and one lake (Rathblathmac). The connection with water is probably not that significant as a) the building is sited near a river for other practical reasons, not because of a sheela-na-gig connection, and b) 69% of sheelas in Ireland are not connected with water at all.

Again, for Britain, the same holds true. 67% of sheelas are not connected with water at all. Two possible figures are associated with a natural spring at the same site (Penmon), but neither of these figures is identifiable as a sheela-na-gig proper. All other sheelas in Britain connected with water are associated with rivers, although one (Stoke-sub-Hamdon) is a gargoyle and therefore associated with rainwater.

I would suggest, therefore, that any connection with natural springs or wells is one of exaggeration, employed to corroborate (incorrectly) a broader sheela-na-gig connection with pre-Christian use of a site that has a natural spring. There cannot be a generalised sheela-na-gig connection with natural wells or springs when there is such a limited number to be found in such a location.

This does not mean that these sites are not holy or sacred or were/are used for spiritual connectedness whether pagan or Christian. But it does mean that sheelas have been appropriated for a connection that does not exist, because such sites are seen as sacred or holy or spiritual, even to the extent that a figure has been labelled as a sheela perhaps because of it.

Towards a definition of the term 'sheela-na-gig'

Based on my analysis the following can be said to be defining characteristics of a sheela-na-gig:

- 1) Nakedness: all are naked
- 2) Vulva: all display a vulva, with fingers in the vulva a likely attribute
- 3) Breasts: are present
- 4) Legs: are wide apart and are too small in relation to the rest of the body
- 5) Eyes: are large
- 6) Mouth: is open
- 7) Nose: represented
- 8) Ears: are not present
- 9) Head: too large in relation to rest of body
- 10) Baldness: heads are bald
- 11) Carved: in relief
- 12) Location: on exterior of building.

This is not a check-list. Rather it is the result of what I have found to be true in the field. When looked at in terms of actual percentages in relation to presence of these characteristics, the following results obtain.

Primary characteristics

Taking characteristics with the highest percentage (i.e. 70%+) produces the following results:

Britain and Ireland

- 1) Nakedness
- 2) Vulva: displayed
- 3) Legs: wide apart
- 4) Nose: represented
- 5) Bald head
- 6) Carved: in relief

Britain

- 1) Ears: not present
- 2) Location: on churches

Ireland

- 1) Head: too large in relation to the rest of the body
- 2) Location: exterior of building

Secondary characteristics

The following are characteristics found in 50% + of sheelas:

Britain and Ireland

- 1) Nakedness
- 2) Vulva: displayed, with fingers in the vulva
- 3) Breasts: present
- 4) Legs: wide apart
- 5) Nose: represented
- 6) Ears: not present
- 7) Head: too large
- 8) Baldness
- 9) Carved: in relief
- 10) Located: on exterior of building.

Britain

- 1) Vulva: displayed, with fingers in vulva, and disproportionately large
- 2) Arms: too large in relation to rest of body
- 3) Location: on a church, and above or next to a door or a window.

Ireland

- 1) Vulva: displayed, with fingers in vulva
- 2) Breasts: present
- 3) Arms: both either going in front or behind body, and in ratio to the rest of the body
- 4) Eyes: large
- 5) Mouth: open

Tertiary characteristics

The following characteristics are found represented in 39%-49% of the images:

Britain and Ireland

- 1) Squatting (with legs wide apart)
- 2) Small legs in relation to the rest of the body

Britain

- 1) Breasts: present
- 2) Arms: both going either in front of or behind the body
- 3) Mouth: open
- 4) Associated with patterns/objects
- 5) South wall location

Ireland

- 1) Distended belly
- 2) Neck: present

Clearly, there is a difference between Britain and Ireland for what ‘constitutes’ a sheela-na-gig. However, there are more and less likely characteristics, as listed above for both regions, that may have been seen as representative of a sheela-na-gig. It would appear that it is the *secondary* characteristics that have largely been used for previous authors’ generalised ‘definitions’, whether articulated or assumed.

It has to be remembered that in addition to these ‘defining’ characteristics there is a great deal of variance. Sheela-na-gigs have to be seen as *individual* images with individual characteristics. Some sheelas may share some of these characteristics for various reasons (such as the same sculptor, or regional similarity for status competitiveness, rather like ‘keeping up with the Joneses’), and some will have attendant, perhaps symbolic, attributes, unique to that image, the meaning of which is now probably inaccessible.

This chapter has presented the extant evidence for sheelas as a body (or bodies) of material culture. However, as with any archaeological material evidence, context clearly is a most important factor in trying to understand the imagery. Thus, the next chapter looks at contexts which sheelas might be seen as part of, and why sheelas have been, perhaps, misunderstood and misplaced, because of lack of contextualisation or poor understanding of it.

Chapter Three

CONTEXTS

(i)

THE (MIS) REPRESENTATION OF AN IMAGE?

How have previous authors and researchers influenced our conception of sheela-na-gigs? The focus of this first part of the chapter is on what other authors have said about sheela-na-gigs, particularly literature that has specifically addressed the subject of sheelas, rather than being tagged on as a quirky after-thought to attract interest. I adopt a chronological framework because it provides a useful insight into how sheelas have been viewed over the past 200 years or so. I do not mean to imply by using such a framework that there is any linear ‘development’ in the ideas surrounding the subject. Fortunately, as I discuss fully in chapter four, sheelas themselves resist such linearity.

Antiquarians and Sheela-na-Gigs

Clearly, the images known as ‘sheela-na-gigs’ existed prior to their being given such a name, but there is no academic written evidence for this term until the nineteenth century Irish antiquarian recognition of them (see Chapter One, pp.8-9 for more about the name). Once this happens, sheela-na-gigs are seen as being associated with apotropaic function and having sexual connotations. The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy for 1840-44, and the meetings associated with it, discuss sheela-na-gigs. This is as a result of several sheelas being brought to the attention of the Academy, such as John O’Donovan’s reference (see below, p.38), and the Lavey sheela as reported to the Academy by Charles Halpin [*PRIA* 1840-44: 565-566]. The RIA viewed sheelas as “‘ ... probably intended as *fetishes* or charms to ward off the evil eye or its influence;

and, consequently, they are found placed over doors of churches and castles” [Andersen 1977: 12, citing PRIA 1840-44: 572].

In the nineteenth century, the sexual aspect of sheelas is afforded them partly because of a perceived connection with fertility. The ‘round tower debate’ (which was topical during the mid-1800s) provides an example. Sheelas were seen by the RIA as being produced by the same presumed-early builders of the towers. There was also a theory that the round towers were introduced from the East, where similar round towers and sheela-like images had a connection. The eastern round towers were seen as phallic with a corresponding female element being represented in the sheela-like images. Thus, the hypothesis was also transcribed to the round towers of Ireland and sheela-na-gigs, partly attributable to Henry O’Brien (who entered the 1830 RIA essay competition, as did George Petrie, on the ‘Origin and uses of the round tower’), despite the association of Irish round towers with sheelas not being that common. O’Brien’s hypothesis on round towers involved his notion of their having a phallic shape. He links this with the name ‘Erin’ looking like the word ‘Iran’, which is in the East where there are round- tower-like pagodas which are also phallic in shape. In addition, he surmised that as the Gaelic word for penis is *bod* it looks like the beginning of the word ‘buddhism’, thus pointing to an Eastern religion connection. From this he produces his full theory: “there was once a Persian civilization, where the creative fertility principle was worshipped under the shape of the phallus, and in phallic-shaped pagodas. This religion, originally taught by Zoroaster, was known as Buddhism or, alternatively, as Sabaism. These Buddhist-cum-Zoroastrians were expelled from Persia, settled in Ireland under the name of the Tuath-De-Danaans and built pagodas there (the Round Towers) to continue their phallic worship” [Leerssen 1996: 118].

Thomas Wright [1866] and, earlier, Richard Payne Knight [1786] also refer to phallic worship (and therefore a link between sex and ritual) as indicated by archaeological evidence. Wright, as I discuss below, also wrote about sheela-na-gigs in the same volume that focused on phallic worship; Wright clearly made a connection between the two.

Joep Leerssen [1996] gives a recent presentation of the ‘round tower debate’. He says the debates concerning round towers lasted throughout the nineteenth century, with highpoints of interest around 1830, 1845 and 1870. He divides the debate into two broad approaches: the romantic and the positivistic. The romantic school ascribed round towers an exotic origin, and generally argued that they dated back to pre-Christian times, (the approach the Royal Irish Academy would appear to have taken); the positivists saw round towers as ecclesiastical buildings and, therefore, Christian, and probably medieval. George Petrie was the main figure associated with the positivist approach. Petrie’s theories, with later refinements by Dunraven [1875-77] and Margaret Stokes [1878], have resulted in the accepted understanding of round towers today, which is that they are an early form of fortification, pre-dating Norman-style castles, functioning as refuges for monastics from marauders, bell-towers and treasuries.

Andersen [1977] and Guest [1936; 1937] appear, however, to be the only authors who give the antiquarians a place in the history of sheela-na-gig studies. Other authors, such as Weir and Jerman, feel that the antiquarian involvement in sheela studies has been adequately presented already (by Andersen in particular) and they, therefore, choose not to add anything further to an understanding of this early period of sheela-na-gig studies: “There is no need to give a history of the discovery of sheela-na-gigs by nineteenth century antiquarians, since Andersen has done this most admirably” [Weir & Jerman 1986: 14]. However, this is not the case, as Andersen’s presentation of the antiquarian involvement is not clearly documented by him. As it is extremely time-consuming to conduct an exhaustive search on the antiquarian contribution to sheela-na-gig studies, there may be more antiquarian references to sheelas than the following presentation of information reflects. A thorough antiquarian search would be a useful further addition to sheela-na-gig studies.

Antiquarians and topographers involved in sheela-na-gig studies

Ireland

Austin Cooper (1759-1830)

In 1783, Cooper made notes about a possible sheela at Lusk, Co. Dublin, referred to by Andersen [1977: 13], and Guest [1936: 111]. Guest incorrectly names Austin Cooper as 'Arthur' and does not think Cooper's description equates with that of a sheela.

Cooper describes the figure thus: "the human features [are] fancifully hideous; the face being seven inches broad, and the head without neck of body, being attached to a pair of kneeling thighs and legs" [JRSAI, 44, 1914: 253, cited by Guest 1936: 111]. Guest includes Cooper's figure at Lusk in her repetition of the list of sheela-na-gigs from the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland list of 1894, which is part of her corpus of known sheelas in Ireland in 1935 [Guest 1936].

John O'Donovan (1809-1861)¹

O'Donovan was an Ordnance Survey officer, whose Ordnance Survey Letters [1840] refers to sheelas at Kiltinane church [vol. II, p. 152, cited in Guest 1936: 127, and Andersen 1977: 10], Cashel, and Ballyfinboy [both referred to in 'Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the Co. Tipperary', 1840, cited by Andersen 1977: 16]. O'Donovan's term for sheelas is 'Sheela-Ny-Gigg', specifically using this term for the Kiltinane example [cited by Guest 1936: 127]. Given the date of the use of this term (1840) by O'Donovan, it clearly must have been in usage before this date (see Chapter One, this thesis, pp.8-9 and later in this chapter, p.89).

T.J. Westropp (1860-1922)²

Westropp was an antiquarian who was prolific in his output of work. He sketched churches particularly in Co. Clare, making drawings of the (supposed) sheela at Clonmacnois and those at Rathblathmac and Killinaboy, the latter two being included in his article of 1894 for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.

¹ For the significance of O'Donovan's work see Boyne's [1987] biography.

² See FitzGerald [2000] for a recent biography of Westropp.

Thomas Wright (1809-1878).

Thomas Wright was also an antiquarian with, amongst other things, a strong interest in phallic imagery within historical or archaeological contexts. He was also a most prolific author on antiquarian subjects generally, and was a co-founder of the British Archaeological Association in 1844.

In his 'The worship of the generative powers during the Middle Ages of western Europe' (1866), Wright discusses Irish sheela-na-gigs, and has seven plates of sheela-na-gig images:

1. Rochestown, Co. Tipperary;
2. Lavey, Co. Cavan (although this is not identified as such by Wright - my identification of Wright's image is taken from Andersen's catalogue which uses Wright's drawing for this image);
3. a figure which Wright states is from Balinahend, Co. Tipperary;
4. a sheela of unknown provenance by Wright, in the museum at Dublin in 1866. It looks like the Cavan figure; Andersen has confused this image with Wright's sixth sheela, as he says it is from the Dawson Collection;
5. the so-called sheela from White Island, Lough Erne;
6. a sheela of unknown provenance by Wright, but "presented to the museum at Dublin by the late Dean Dawson" [Wright 1866: 37];
7. a sheela "formerly in the possession of Sir Benjamin Chapman, Bart., of Killoa Castle, Westmeath, and is now in a private collection in London. It was found in 1859 at Chloran, in a field on Sir Benjamin's estate known by the name of the "Old Town," from whence stones had been removed at previous periods, though there are now very small remains of building. This stone was found at a depth of about 5 feet from the surface, which shows that the building, a church no doubt, must have fallen into ruin a long time ago. Contiguous to this field, and at a distance of about two hundred yards from the spot where the Shelagh-na-Gig was found, there is an abandoned churchyard ..." [Wright 1866: 37-38].

Wright sees the sheelas as survivals of a pre-Christian fertility worship, which was a notion that Margaret Murray and Edith Guest would later also present.

Also worth mentioning are the eighteenth century antiquarian Francis Grose, who published 'Antiquities of Ireland' in 1797, with romanticised illustrations of Irish churches and castles – but no sheelas are represented; and the nineteenth century topographer Windele, who collected information about a single sheela

figure at Dunmanway, Co. Cork, and another at Barnahealy, neither of which now exist. Windele called sheelas “hags of the castle”. Andersen quotes from a topographic manuscript of notes by Windele referring to a medieval castle ruin:

“At Barnahealy was found a brown, gritty stone with a rude representation of a female figure in nudibus. This is one of those old Fetish figures often found in Ireland on the fronts of churches as well as castles, they are called “Hags of the Castle”. And when placed above the keystone of the door arch were supposed to possess a tutelary or protective power so that an enemy passing by would be disarmed of evil intent against the building on seeing it”

[Windele 1856: 710, cited in Andersen 1977: 14].

Britain

There are many more Irish than British antiquarian writings on the subject, probably because it was seen as an Irish phenomenon initially. In Britain, individual instances of sheelas are referred to as part of a general history of a church or geographical location. The term ‘Idol’ appears to have been used by British antiquarians instead of ‘sheela-na-gig’ for these images. Early references to sheelas occur in Worsley [1781: 216, cited by Andersen 1977: 11], and in Albin [1795: 521, cited by Andersen *ibid.*], both referring to the Binstead sheela as the “Idol”. However, I will discuss one British antiquarian who had some input into perceptions of sheelas.

G.R. Lewis

Lewis was an architect who published his ‘Illustrations of Kilpeck church, Herefordshire: in a series of drawings made on the spot: with an essay on ecclesiastical design, and a descriptive interpretation’ in 1842. The author acknowledgement of this tome reveals that Lewis was interested in a good deal more than architecture: “author of a series of groups of the people of France and Germany; of the illustrations to Mr. Dibdin’s tour through France and Germany; view of the muscles of the human body; an address to the manufacturer’s on the subject of education as connected with design in every department of British manufacture; British forest trees, Part 1; and illustrations of phrenology, No. 1”. The church at Kilpeck is a fantastic example of Romanesque sculpture, with -superb intertwined hybrids and beasts depicted around the main doorway, and a

magnificent corbel table containing probably the best known British example of a sheela.

Everything architectural is seen as symbolising something scriptural for Lewis and he is clearly anti-pagan: “the Christian religion requires no further aid than its own for support. We require not the heathen mythology, nor their gods and goddesses, to remind us of the Holy Scriptures” [p.vi].

Referring to Lewis’s Plate 9 [**Plate 12**], which contains his drawing of the sheela corbel, this is how Lewis interprets the corbels:

“Fig. 13 is the Cross carried by the Horse, to denote its being planted in every part of the world ... St Mark ch.xvi, v.15, ‘And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’. Fig. 14 is Caiaphas ... and 15 [is one of] the brutes who ‘smote him and cried out away with him, away with him, crucify him’. The monster-like expression given to these two [Figs. 12 and 15] is to denote the act was monstrous” [p.15].

Lewis suggests he does not really know what the rest of the corbels signify, for he says “now, I have no doubt the rest of the original brackets [corbels] were designed to explain their numbers and their situations according to those parts of the Gospel they were intended to illustrate. But of the brackets as they now stand, they were designed to shew good and bad works” [p.15].

Of the sheela corbel, Lewis says “and 26 represents a fool – the cut in his chest, the way to his heart, denotes it is always open and to all alike. As these sculptures are evidently the result of different minds and times, it would be in vain to expect to arrive at any other explanations, further than to expose bad works by monstrosities, and good ones by innocence and friendly feeling” [Lewis 1842: 15-16]. The first part of this quote is used by Andersen in his discussion of Lewis; he does not give the full quote, or any other reference to Lewis’s neutrality about the significance or meaning of the sheela corbel (see p. 57, this chapter).

The 1920s and '30s

Margaret Murray (1863-1963)

Margaret Murray was an anthropologist with a major academic interest in the study of witchcraft. She was already “a distinguished Egyptologist”³ when she began her research into witchcraft. In 1921, she produced a study entitled ‘The witch-cult in Western Europe’ which was seen as at least controversial by some, and severely criticised by others as being too fantastical in its deductions.

Murray’s approach for her research into the Great Witch Hunt was to document the long-established theory that it represented the extermination of European paganism, using records of the early modern witch trials. Although severely critical of Murray’s methodology⁴, Ronald Hutton [1991] says her book deserves our respect in that it was the first attempt to study the Great Witch Hunt dispassionately, as an aspect of social history, and using material contemporary with the events described.

Looking at her bibliographic record, she clearly devoted much of the second and third decades of the twentieth century to the study of witchcraft, with a few examples of sheela-na-gig research interest. Thus, in 1923 (writing with A.D. Passmore) she looked at the sheela at Oaksey, Wiltshire; in 1929 she wrote an article entitled ‘Fertility figures’ which includes sheelas; in 1934 she focused on this subject area again with ‘Female fertility figures’; and in 1936 she published a brief description of the sheela at South Tawton, Devon.

Her involvement in the study of sheela-na-gigs has to be seen within the context of her background steeped in the study of witchcraft. It can be justifiably said that she may have been biased in wanting to see the sheelas as part of a fertility cult to support her theory of the continuity of the witch cult from prehistoric times until the modern day.

³ Steven Runciman, foreword to *The witch-cult of Western Europe*, 1921: 3.

⁴ For example, “her ability to interpret evidence was ... dubious, for she had a tendency to draw hasty conclusions and make unsupported assertions” [Hutton 1991: 302].

Critics of Murray

Ronald Hutton

Hutton [1991] is highly critical of Murray's academic methodology, saying both her sources and her treatment of them were seriously defective. He criticises her for using a limited amount of published source material and ignoring the much greater amount of unpublished evidence. He also says she ignored or misquoted evidence which might have indicated that the actions attributed to the alleged witches were physically impossible; or she rationalised it, he says, by suggesting, for example, that an illusion of flying was created by drugs, or that accounts by women of the coldness of the Devil's penis were produced by penetration of them by an artificial phallus as part of a fertility rite [Hutton 1991: 302].

Hutton also says "she pruned and rearranged her evidence ruthlessly to support her assertion that the 'religion' concerned was standard throughout Europe. Thus, she mangled data continually to fit her assertion that all witches operated in covens of 13, though it is obvious even from the limited data which she scanned that most of the accused were solitary individuals" [Hutton 1991: 302-3]; that her "ignorance of ancient paganism in Western Europe prevented her from realizing that the rituals imputed to early modern witches were not antique rites but parodies of contemporary Christian ceremonies and social mores" [Hutton 1991: 303]; and that "She had constructed her image of medieval paganism. It had ancient Gaelic festivals and a congregational structure found in the pages of sixteenth century demonologists" [Hutton 1991: 304].

Hutton finishes his annihilation of Murray, with a sense of relief after the longevity of the acceptance of the 'Murray thesis', with its credibility collapsing in academe during the 1970s, when it was "at last systematically attacked by the authors of works which had a very large readership. Two in particular, Keith Thomas [1971] and Norman Cohn [1975], exposed her misrepresentation of evidence" [Hutton 1991: 306].

Jacqueline Simpson

Where Hutton is highly critical, Simpson is unremitting in her attack on Margaret Murray's work. In her 1994 article, Simpson speaks as a member of the Folklore Society and its International Advisory Board panel. Simpson says of Murray:

“No British folklorist can remember Dr Margaret Murray without embarrassment and a sense of paradox. She is one of the few folklorists whose name became widely known to the public, but among scholars her reputation is deservedly low; her theory ... [of the witch-cult] ... is now seen to be based on deeply flawed methods and illogical arguments.”

[Simpson 1994: 89]

The scathing comments and critique of Murray and her work continue throughout the article, with similarly scathing supporting critiques cited: Burr [1921-2; 1934-5], Halliday [1922], Ewen [1933; 1938], and Parrinder [1958].

Murray's sheela-na-gig studies.

i) 'The sheela-na-gig at Oaksey' [1923].

This very short piece announces that there is a sheela-na-gig at Oaksey, Wiltshire; that it is “probably the remains of a fertility cult” [p.140]; that there is nothing to show whether it is in original position, contemporary or earlier than the church; and that the “size and importance of the left hand ... is also a suggestion that the figure is pre-Christian” [p.141]. There is no full description of the sheela, with a justification of severe weathering, although her “features ... appear to have been rudely indicated” [p.141].

Presumably, the Oaksey sheela was the first that Murray wrote about, and she subsequently became interested in them.

ii) 'Fertility figures' [1929].

Whilst stating that there has been very little written about “the traces of fertility worship in Christian churches” [p.133], she wishes to contribute to an understanding of the dating of sheela-na-gigs by publishing the figure from the priory church at Hexham. The figure she refers to, however, is clearly not a sheela-na-gig: it is a grimacing tricephalic figure

with no trunk, and a beast between its legs (there is a photograph of the figure in Murray's article). It has not been assimilated into the literature as one as no other author refers to it as a sheela. Weir and Jerman have Hexham, Northumberland in their gazetteer (with no reference to what type of image it is), no reference to it in the index, or in their map of England and Wales showing the location of exhibitionist figures [Weir and Jerman 1986:128].

The figure is described by Murray as "a three-headed phallic personage with hairy legs, riding on a creature with cloven feet, lions ears, human features, and a large protruding tongue. The three heads represent: on the right, a rounded fat face with the mouth slightly open; in the middle, a formidable person, with drooping corners to the mouth (the nose is rather damaged); on the left, a fleshless skull" [p.133]. There is no mention of the vulva or any other 'sheela' characteristics. The supposed-sheela is one of a series of sculptured images on a chantry screen dated to 1480-1491. It would appear that Murray is much more interested in finding connections that support her theory for the fertility cult and this article is, perhaps, an example of this, for she concludes: "the actual meaning of these figures is still obscure, but I am inclined to see in them the remains of that ancient worship which was too strongly rooted among the people to be destroyed by Christianity, and whose emblems survived even in the sacred places of the new religion" [p.134].

iii) 'A 'sheila-na-gig' figure at South Tawton' [1936].

A single, short paragraph, referring to the sheela at South Tawton with a photograph by C.J.P. Cave. Murray dates the sheela (a wooden roof boss) as contemporary with the wooden roof, C15th. Murray also mentions that she and A.D. Passmore were the first to call attention to sheelas in English churches, when they were considered to be "peculiar to Ireland". She says their position in English churches "shows that they were regarded as sacred" but she does not validate this.

iv) 'Female fertility figures' [1934].

This article is Murray's main contribution in connection with sheela-na-gigs. Female fertility figures had been termed generically, says Murray, as 'Mother-goddess', but she says this is not sufficient and should be further sub-divided into:

- 1) The Universal Mother or Isis type
- 2) The Divine Woman or Ishtar type
- 3) The Personified Yoni or Baubo type.

Murray says each type is derived from a different religious background, and therefore given a distinctive name as a goddess. The types are usually quite distinct from each other, she says. Murray's third type, the Personified Yoni, represents images in which the genitalia are the main focus, and secondary characteristics, such as breasts, are minimized. This is, therefore, the sheela type for Murray.

The Personified Yoni is quite different from the Mother-goddess, according to Murray, who says that they are often confused. The Mother-goddess has to have a connection with being a mother, i.e. where "the child is an essential part, actual or implied" [Murray 1934: 93]. This may be represented by full breasts, often exaggerated in size or number; by a child being held in the mother's arms; or by being pregnant. In other words, represented as a child-bearing woman. The Divine Woman is in no way a Mother-goddess as she has not borne a child and is still a virgin. Murray says this type appeals only to men and belongs to the group of deities especially worshipped by men, whereas the Baubo type was worshipped by women only.

The Baubo

It is worth recounting part of Murray's presentation of the goddess Baubo, as it plays an important role in her theories about sheelas.

Murray states that Baubo is Egyptian, the extant sculptural images of the goddess are Roman, but the legend is known only through Greek accounts. Baubo was very popular in Egypt, and under the Ptolemies and the Romans Baubo figures occurred in greatest numbers, which was when, according to Murray, the deities of the common people became important.

Murray describes the Baubo figure as being a usually nude female (if clothed, only the upper part of the body is covered, concealing the breasts), with a head-dress which is often very elaborate. The figure is usually seated on the ground, legs spread out so as to display the pudenda, which is clearly visible and often exaggerated in size. The usual position is with the legs horizontal, knees bent, feet turned inwards. Sometimes the figure is squatting, with the knees raised

and turned outwards. In every case, says Murray, the outward spread of the thighs is essential. The pose of the arms varies: raised, held forward, or laid on the thighs to stretch the legs apart and emphasize the pudenda. In all forms of the Baubo, Murray says, the breasts are normal, or smaller than normal in size (this can be criticised for being an ethno-centric view: what is 'normal?'), sometimes they are hardly indicated, or clothed. Murray concludes "it is obvious, therefore, that the whole emphasis is laid on the genitalia and not on the breasts" [Murray 1934: 95]. Murray, therefore, is still focusing entirely on an approach to the female body based on sexual characteristics: vulva or breasts. Although arm position is mentioned, Murray does not give it any importance.

Murray states that the Baubo figures must have had precursors and cites a number of examples which she feels show this, thus supporting an evolutionary development of the form. In the early types, the 'primitive artistic convention' limited the representation of the genitalia, and, thus, the exaggeration of the pudenda was by other means such as colour, Murray says, becoming more specific with the advent of the naturalistic art of Greece and Rome. Some of these Baubo-esque figures were kept in houses or buried in graves (Murray does not cite examples), usually of females. The figures of the Roman period, she says (again not citing examples), were usually kept in the inner part of the house (i.e. the women's apartments). Thus, Murray concludes, it is therefore clear that the figures were for the use of women.

Apart from pointing out that the Personified Yoni type has as its main emphasis the pudenda, (which must be viewed from a frontal position to make the emphasis and to be exaggerated in size and distorted in position), Murray does not give an explanation for their role, unlike the other two types. She does this, perhaps, deliberately, for it is at this point that she brings in the connection with sheela-na-gigs. Using the Baubo type's characteristics she concludes that sheelas conform to this type very well: "always nude ... represented in the frontal aspect ... legs usually wide apart ... hands [positioned] to call attention to the genitalia; breasts are never more than normal, often barely indicated, and sometimes omitted altogether, the genitalia are exaggerated in size and position" [Murray 1934: 97].

However, she does not allow for those sheelas that do not conform to this type. Murray also says that the sheela is peculiar to the British Isles, not being found in mainland Europe. Weir and Jerman, and Andersen clearly do not agree with this. Murray says that in France the sheela's place is taken by the two-tailed mermaid, holding a tail in either hand which Murray interprets as reminiscent of the Baubo type. She also sees the sheela as being regarded as divine, or having divine attributes, because of its association with Christian churches. This assertion is not substantiated, however, as representations found on churches do not necessarily equate with divine status.

It is not difficult to understand why Murray was viewed as a 'non-conformist' by some of her academic peers. In discussing the Romsey sheela, she puts forward the idea that the staff which the sheela holds represents a means of breaking the hymen (as performed in Egypt by the bridegroom's fingers) of a bride being prepared for marriage within the convent (Romsey Abbey had been a nunnery). Murray points out that "throughout the Middle Ages young girls of good position were brought up in nunneries, and at puberty left the convent to be married" [Murray 1934: 98]. Further, Murray makes a suggestion for the "psychological reasons for the use and subsequent sanctity of the Sheila-na-gig" [*ibid.*: 99], which focuses on a female interpretation of female psychology, rather than on the "masculine ideas of what a woman should feel or be" [*ibid.*] which prevailed (and still prevail) in the published literature. She does put forward her theory "tentatively as a basis for discussion" [*ibid.*], which indicates she was aware of her maverick tendencies. Her theory is that, given the proposed connection between Baubo figures and sheelas, sheelas may also have been used within a ritual context. As Baubo was a goddess of women only, Murray's theory is that sheelas (like Baubo figures) appealed to the sexual side of women, and, therefore, "some form of homo-sexuality was practised by women as a religious rite" [*ibid.*]. Another related theory suggested by Murray is that sheelas may have been used to "rouse and stimulate the sex desires of women" [*ibid.*]. She conjectures that sheelas imply the presence of the male (only in the Whittlesford example is the male explicit, she says), and thus the figures represent the female ready for her mate. The psychological interpretation she gives is that female viewers of sheelas would be sexually stimulated by looking at them because they would identify with the figure. Murray concludes that, although her theories may

not be correct, sheelas made and still make (as of 1934) an appeal to women's nature.

Margaret Murray's theories are challenging and of interest to me in studying sheelas in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and I shall refer to them again in a subsequent chapter. They have been heavily criticised by many authors, but Murray is often cited in connection with sheela-na-gig studies. Her input into the study of sheelas is, therefore, of perhaps greater significance than has been acknowledged. She clearly disturbed, and still disturbs, the status quo.

Edith Guest

Edith Guest was a contemporary of C.J.P. Cave (an authority on medieval roof bosses, see Cave [1948]) and T.C. Lethbridge (Director of excavations, and author of many 'fringe' books on archaeology) at Cambridge during the 1930s. She was an archaeologist who worked with Margaret Murray on occasion, as on the Minorcan excavation at Trapucó of 1932, an expedition entirely financed by the Cambridge Museum of Ethnology. She also took an academic interest in sheela-na-gigs, writing two significant articles on the subject during the 1930s: a) 'Irish sheela-na-gigs in 1935' [1936], and b) 'Some notes on the dating of sheela-na-gigs' [1937].

a) 'Irish sheela-na-gigs in 1935' [1936]

The main focus of this article is to report Guest's findings related to creating an up-to-date list of the extant Irish sheela-na-gigs at that time. There had not been such a list compiled since 1905⁵, which largely repeated the content of an earlier list⁶ (which was the first such list of sheelas to be produced), and Guest felt that a fresh list was required. This involved her collecting scattered references in various journals and visiting every sheela as far as possible. For this Herculean enterprise she engaged the services of Helen M. Roe as her assistant.

Guest suggests that the understanding of the term 'sheela-na-gig' had become more clearly accepted by 1935 than it had been in 1894, and that it "is now understood as denoting a female figure so displaying or calling attention to

⁵ Grove-White, Col. J. *Historical and topographical notes on Buttevant, Doneraile, Mallow*, v.1, 1905.

⁶ *JRSAI*, xxiv, 1894, pp. 27, 33, 77-81, 392-394.

anatomical features, as to suggest that it is a symbol of a fertility cult" [Guest 1936:107]. Guest is clearly influenced by the work of Margaret Murray, in terms of interpretation, as it was Murray who saw the sheelas as representing a continuation of a fertility cult. As mentioned above, Murray's work has always been perceived as rather alternative, and has not been widely accepted, and even dismissed, by the academic fraternity, so it is interesting that Guest should adopt her hypothesis in relation to the sheelas.

Guest lists sheelas from the 1894 list, of which there are 34; sheelas in addition to this list, which number 29; and figures which have been called sheelas but which Guest thinks are probably not, which number 5. She provides a limited description and location for each figure. She then attaches a series of appendices: 1) A list of sheelas arranged in counties; 2) On the probable identity of numbers 3 and 27 in the 1894 list of sheela-na-gigs with a figure in the National Museum Dublin, relating to the possibility of a stone from St. Kieran's [Seir Kieran, Offaly] church being an unprovenanced sheela in the museum; 3) On the probability that the figure attributed to Dunmanway is the wooden image belonging to Ballyvourney; 4) The term Sheela-na-gig; 5) Some figures which are not sheela-na-gigs, but are apparently connected with a fertility cult: female, male, and indeterminate.

It is interesting to observe that Andersen clearly re-used much of Guest's information, without perhaps re-checking its validity. What is also interesting is that Guest abstains from andro- and ethno-centric bias in her descriptions. Her assessment is refreshingly objective in comparison with Andersen's. Referring to Murray's paper of 1935 (in which Murray states that nearly all sheela-na-gigs in Great Britain are or were in or about churches, and that traces of ancient rites connected with them are still to be recognised), she points out that this is not the case in Ireland:

"Only twenty-one figures, including the doubtful or more than doubtful examples, have been found in churches or their immediate vicinity, or are known to have been originally so placed ... Of the examples found in churches, only nine are in their architectural setting ... Moreover, though sheela-na-gigs are found inserted in the masonry of church towers, so with equal frequency are odd pieces of sculpture of other types ... Hence, it would appear that the presence of these figures in churches in Ireland is

of doubtful significance, and that the buildings in which they are found are simply those most likely to serve for their preservation .”

[Guest 1936:121-122]

The final significant feature of this article by Guest is her creation of a typology for the sheelas, which is as follows [Guest 1936:109]:

Type I Arms (which are usually in front of the thighs but may pass behind them) flexed, and hands directed to the lower abdomen.

- (a) Thighs splayed
- (b) Thighs absent or slightly indicated
- (c) Legs straight down

Type II⁷ One arm and hand raised to the head: legs as in Type I (a).

Type III Thighs and knees tightly flexed over the abdomen.

Guest employed this typology as an expedient way of describing the sheelas. She does not use it to imply any evolution of the image through the different types.

b) ‘Some notes on the dating of sheela-na-gigs’ [1937]

Guest cites the figure from White Island as being the only figure, in connection with the dating of sheela-na-gigs, which had received adequate attention, and dated to the seventh to eighth century AD (later, Andersen saw the White Island figure as a ‘pre-cursor’ to the ‘true’ sheela, but Guest clearly includes it as a sheela proper here). One criticism of her acceptance of this figure is that she does not explain why she is including it as a sheela. She, inadvertently, points out that the general assumption had been to apply an evolutionary model to sheelas: “ ... that figures so primitive in idea and so crude in execution must have an early origin, and that when they appear in buildings of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, they must needs have been transferred from some earlier foundation” [Guest 1937:176]. However, she does not agree with this, stating that an opposite conclusion can be made with figures which are contemporary in execution with the buildings they are found on.

She goes on to cite examples which show evidence of contemporaneity from ornament: Rath Blathmaic, Clare; Liathmore, Tipperary; and Balinderry Castle,

⁷ The text actually says ‘Type I’ here but must be an error

Galway. Thus, the figure from Rath is dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century, that from Liathmor to the twelfth, or possibly eleventh century, and that at Balinderry to the fifteenth century. Guest uses comparative dating, looking at similar motifs from other buildings with a date attributed, and an assessment based on a possible typology of the motifs is also made. For example, at Rath there is fine beading along foliage stems and on the animals' ears; Guest says that such beading is also found at Killeslin (and other sites) dated to about AD1000; beading is also found at earlier sites such as on the doorway at Aghowle (seventh or eighth century) but these beads are larger, more like pellets, and form the only ornament, whereas at later sites they are closely associated with other features of the design, she says.

So, Guest is, in fact, applying an evolutionary/typological understanding to the motifs. Both her other examples here are assessed as contemporary with the actual structure of the building, based on their architectural inclusion within the structure itself.

With regard to sheelas on quoins of castles, Guest refers to four examples which she sees as contemporary with the building: Ballyfinboy, Tipperary; Tullavin, Limerick; Doon, Offaly; and Moygara, Sligo. The Moygara sheela is described as being one of a pair of fallen corbel stones by Guest, but Andersen says the design is so worn as to be unrecognizable [1977:150], and Roberts [1995] says this sheela is missing. Thus, the validity of Guest's statement, for the Moygara sheela, cannot be tested.

Guest is inclined to think that the Moate Castle sheela is a later example ("a sheela-na-gig parodied at a comparatively late date" [Guest 1937:179]), and certainly not in original situ. Her use of the word 'parodied' suggests something like Andersen's interpretation of a development and then decline of the image, from the 'proto-sheela' to the 'pure' form to a 'parody' of itself, and hence the suggestion of a waning in the 'power' of the image. Thus, Andersen may have usurped the original idea from Guest.

With regard to churches, Guest states that there are a few good examples of figures set up along with the church as late as the twelfth to fourteenth centuries:

Liathmor (twelfth century), again; Kiltinane (fourteenth century - now stolen), Tipperary; and possibly Tracton Abbey, Cork (Cistercian foundation 1224).

The latest dated sheela Guest refers to is from St. Bridget's Well, Castlemagner, Cork (dated by Du Noyer⁸ to the seventeenth century). Guest says the style of this sheela harmonizes well with this date [Guest 1937:180].

It is very hard to date the detached sheelas, unless there is some evidence linking them with the building from which they are thought to have come, but this, of course, is not primary evidence. Guest does note, however, that some of them are cut in high relief which, she says, is a feature not belonging to very early sculpture; for example, the Seir Kieran image (now in the National Museum) is sculpted almost in the round.

Guest's conclusion to this article is that the argument for a late date for many of the sheelas does not negate the possibility of an early origin or the practice of a cult or the probability of earlier symbols. Again, she refers to the White Island figure, which she sees as an isolated example in its degradation ("a fate not known to be shared by any others" [*ibid.*]) which she attributes to "a local or temporary suppression of cult and symbols, interest in which was not to die completely for many hundred years" [*ibid.*].

Guest's interpretation of linking sheelas with some form of cult is not surprising given the time at which she was writing, with other contemporary researchers such as Murray instigating this view. It is also in keeping with the trends of the time in anthropology with work by researchers such as Evans-Pritchard ('Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande', 1937) and Malinowski ('Coral gardens and their magic', 1935). On the whole, she is an objective researcher who is thorough in her method, whilst espousing a methodology of evolutionary typology which was, again, the norm for the period in which she was writing. What is less acceptable is that, forty years later, Andersen would do likewise.

⁸ Du Noyer, G.V., Sketches, II: 82. [Held at RSAI library.]



Plate 1: Sheela at Killinaboy, Co. Clare



Plate 2: C15th Beast head (with human legs) disgorging smaller beast head, St Michael's, Brent Knoll, Somerset



Plate 3: C12th Foliate head, Boyle Abbey, Co. Roscommon



Plate 4: Early C12th font at Holdgate, Shropshire



Plate 5: C12th South doorway, St Helena's,
Austerfield, S. Yorkshire,
with tympanum, beakheads and chevrons



Plate 6: Amphisbaena (a dragon with an additional head at the tip of the tail), east capital of the south door at Broadwey, Dorset.
(A. Woodcock)

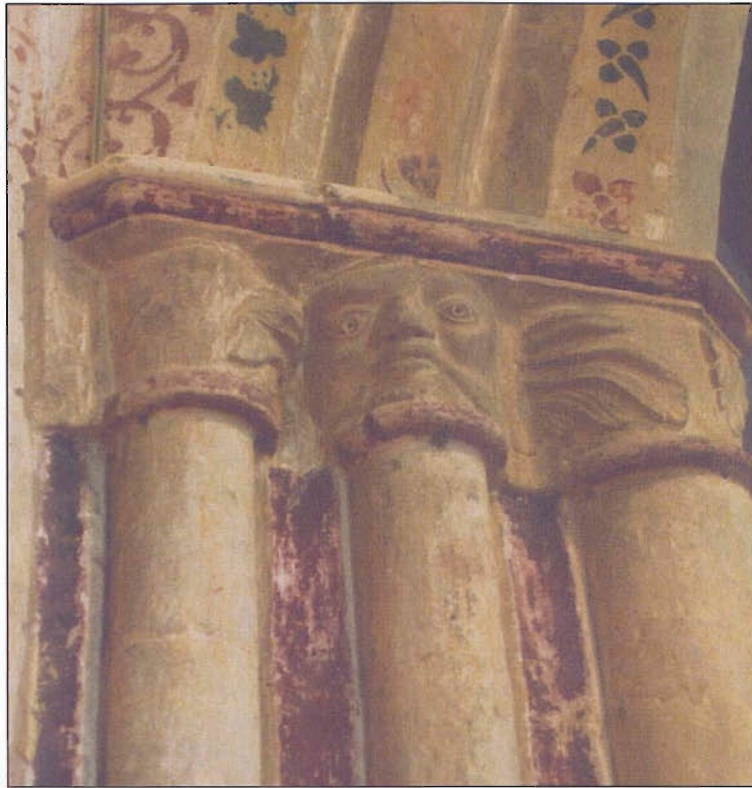


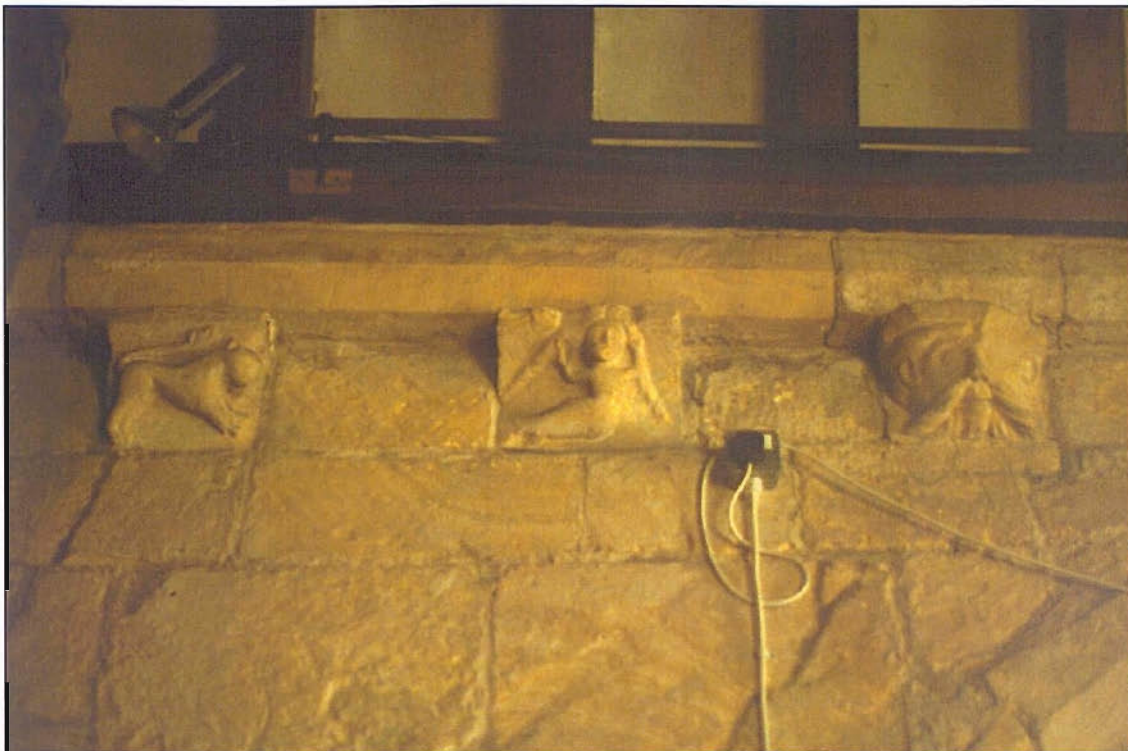
Plate 7: late medieval foliate head carved on the capitals beneath the crossing tower at Winterbourne Whitechurch, Dorset



Plate 8: Mouth-puller with long drooping tongue, external north-west corner of nave at Studland (c1125-1140).
(A. Woodcock)



Plate 9: Acrobat, chancel arch, Nuns' Chapel, Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly



**Plate 10: C12th corbels, chancel south wall at St Helen's,
Bilton-in-Ainstey, N. Yorkshire, with mermaid in centre**



**Plate 11: Tumbler/ exhibitionist, C14th, St Helen's,
Darley Dale, Derbyshire**

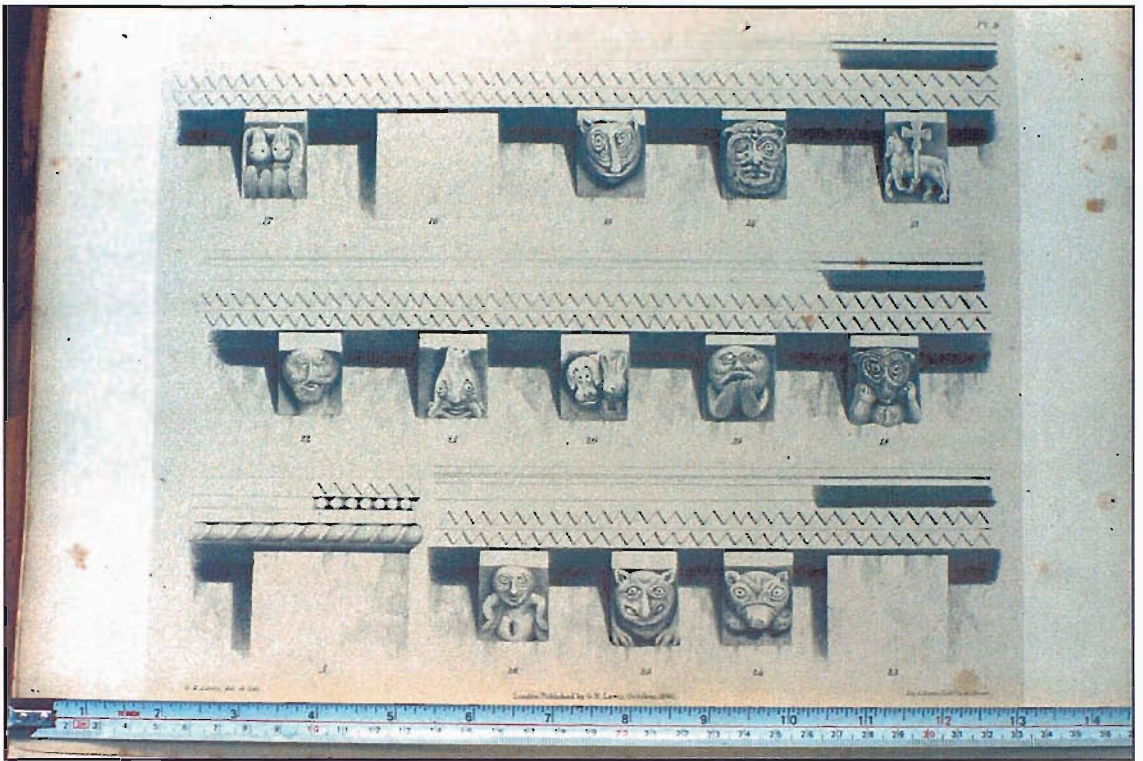


Plate 12: G.R. Lewis's drawing of corbels at Kilpeck, including the sheela



Plate 13: Kilpeck sheela and adjacent corbel

The 1970s

Sheridan and Ross

There appears to be a hiatus in sheela-na-gig studies during the 1950s and '60s, and it is not until the 1970s that a resurgence of interest takes place. Sheridan & Ross include a chapter on sheela-na-gigs in their book 'Grotesques and gargoyles' [1975], which I shall refer to again in a subsequent chapter. This book, whilst not dealing exclusively with sheela-na-gigs, does represent a different view from most of the other authors, concerning paganism and its link with imagery in Christian contexts. In addition, as they devote a significant chapter on sheela-na-gigs, I have included it in this critique.

Sheridan & Ross place sheelas in the category of fertility figures, and say they require explanation in ecclesiastical contexts, but cannot give an explanation as they say sheelas remain elusive. This also suggests that they think sheelas do not require explanation in non-ecclesiastical contexts (perhaps because they seem, to Sheridan and Ross, less out of place in secular contexts). They describe sheelas in terms of sexuality of the figures, saying their postures reveal basic fertility imagery (i.e. gestures indicating genitalia), which are sometimes grossly exaggerated. Thus, they confuse the concept of sexuality as being represented by imagery of genitalia.

Sheridan & Ross's suggested possible explanation for the meaning of sheela-na-gigs is directly related to Celtic mythology. They refer to a territorial goddess, associated with the land, widespread throughout Europe and found within the Irish myths. This territorial goddess is normally a radiantly lovely woman, but in playing a fundamental part in the search for the king-elect she transforms into a "hideous, sexual hag" [Sheridan & Ross 1975: 18]. When the true king agrees to accept her "repulsive" advances, she changes back into her lovely form, and by her union with the king blesses his reign and protects the land from evil and calamity. Sheridan & Ross say "this seems a possible interpretation for these hideous fertility figures" [1975: 19], as the notion of the duality of the earth goddess was part of the common mythology of 'ancient' Europe. Sheridan & Ross do not seem to incorporate any notion of the Celtic triple goddess here though. They then propose that the sheela in symbolising these powers meant

the Church / Christianity retained the image as “her grossness would be calculated to keep the most fearsome forces at bay [and] her favour would ensure the good of the building and its prosperity” [1975: 19]. So, again, an apotropaic function is being ascribed to the sheelas by Sheridan & Ross, which they see as resulting from a mixture of paganism and mythology.

This understanding may have some credibility for some of the sheelas, but I do not subscribe to such a universal theorising for the image; there are too many variables to allow for such generalisation, and Sheridan and Ross do not allow for different contexts, both temporal and locational.

Sheridan & Ross place sheelas within their theme of ‘fertility’, and include the image as part of the repertoire of ‘sexual’, ‘erotic’, and ‘obscene’ carvings. Their description of the sheela is that she is “hag-like and coarse, and indicates her genitals with her hands” [1975: 64]. They refer particularly to the Kilpeck sheela which they say “probably stems directly from Irish tradition” [*ibid.*], seeing this sheela’s specific characteristics as representative of the “type of fertility figure found in so many Irish churches” [*ibid.*]. Does this mean that Sheridan & Ross see an influence from Ireland to England? This is an interesting idea, as all other authors see a diffusionistic movement of the image (and other images) from east to west. Thus, Sheridan & Ross are not consistent in their logic, as they discuss a universal pan-European concept for these images, but also seem here to be supporting an insular origin. Contrary to their dismissal of the importance of dating, a date at least of the structure would have been useful here.

They are unsure of the validity in the argument of the didactic function for sheelas as they see the representations as “dangerous” in this respect for their ability to arouse rather than suppress “sensuality”. This again is not a consistent argument, for on the one hand they say sheelas are “hag-like” (implying, as with their description of the Irish mythological female, they are repulsive), and on the other that they are capable of arousing “carnal feelings”.

Sheridan & Ross’s work takes a different slant from other, contemporary, approaches to the subject of medieval ‘marginal’ sculpture. They do not see the images as “meaningless decorations of purely functional features” [1975: 19]. They ascribe a pagan origin to many of these images and they see the images as

related in some way to other 'similar' images across Europe. But they themselves admit they do not really know what they mean, and so whilst it is refreshing to see a significant pre-Andersen reference to sheela-na-gigs and an attempt at placing the image in context, the attempt is very limited.

Jørgen Andersen

The next major contribution comes from Jørgen Andersen, a Danish art-historian, who carried out an extensive survey of sheelas for his PhD thesis of 1976. He produced this as a book [1977] which contains a corpus of sheela-na-gigs, and is the most frequently quoted reference work for sheela-na-gig studies after that date. As this work is such an important one in connection with sheelas, and how they have subsequently been viewed, I have given it a thorough critique.

In general, *The witch on the wall* is not at all easy to read, consisting of huge chunks of rambling text with no subdivisions for content, other than chapter headings. Thus there is no proper organisation of the information – in some respects, there is simply too much information.

Right from the outset, four main problems can be identified:

- 1) Andersen takes the antiquarian, nineteenth century, focus on these representations as his starting point (and is, therefore, restricted to a nineteenth century understanding).
- 2) His use of the term 'erotic' in relation to these representations appears to support an understanding of them in terms of nude equating with rude, and that nudity and sexuality go together.
- 3) A general failure to outline what his research has focused on or the particular methodology followed.
- 4) A similar failure to give supporting evidence for statements (for example, why it was not possible in the early nineteenth century to make comparisons between figures).

Andersen does not address the question of how sheelas may have been perceived prior to their Victorian interpretation, for he says that by the mid-

1800s “with the developing interest in archaeology and the art of the past, antiquarians began to notice this female figure” [*ibid.*: 10] especially in Ireland, where the majority of sheelas are. It is as though they only exist and become valid as images with the antiquarian acknowledgement of them. He does not allow for other understandings of these representations such as popular, folkloric understandings (although there are attempts at this in his second chapter), or the medieval perception of them. Andersen thus appears to be presenting a linear-chronological appreciation of the sheela as a motif within art history, rather than as material culture objects that existed (and still exist) within social, cultural, and spiritual contexts.

In terms of methodology (point 3 above), Andersen does have a footnote referring to Guest’s method to “leave aside many detached examples, in order to concentrate the discussion about sheelas in datable settings” [*ibid.*: 14]. He states that the same approach has been adopted in his work. This is an important point and it is significant that Andersen only mentions it in a footnote: clearly he does not place great value on explaining his methodology or approach to the fieldwork or subject generally.

Andersen and the antiquarians

Andersen begins his study with the antiquarian ‘discovery’ of sheela-na-gigs. He refers especially to G.R. Lewis (who in the mid-nineteenth century illustrated medieval churches in the west of England), and specifically to his lithographic work illustrating the churches of Shobdon and Kilpeck in Herefordshire.

Andersen quotes Lewis’s explanation of the image of the sheela at Kilpeck (unrecognised at the time, Andersen postulates, as a sheela – in other words it didn’t have an ‘official’ label):

“and 26 represents a fool – the cut in his chest, the way to his heart, denotes it is always open and to all alike” [Lewis 1842: 15].

As mentioned when discussing G.R. Lewis earlier, Andersen only partially quotes Lewis here, which limits our understanding of what Lewis thought the image was of. It is interesting to note that Andersen does not comment on Lewis’s use of the possessive pronoun being masculine. This is complete negation of the image as a female and/or androgynous representation; it is being presented as male.

Instead, Andersen concludes that it is as a result of the Victorian attitude towards, and concealment of, the vulva that sheelas have become part of the “literature of erotica” [Andersen 1977: 10], the Kilpeck sheela often being ascribed a female fertility figure status. This is a confused conclusion, given that the image has just been depicted as male!

The RIA Proceedings of 1840-44 refers to talismans in connection with sheelas. The idea of the ‘lucky horseshoe’ is mentioned at the RIA meeting and is referred to by Andersen and the links made between this object and the sheela at “Kiltynan Castle [holding] the lucky horseshoe in one hand and a cross or dagger in the other” [PRIA 1840-44: 570-571, cited by Andersen 1977: 12]. Andersen’s own comments on the Kiltinane sheela are that it is “a small figure of particularly threatening looks, now set in the wall of a round well-house or –tower below Kiltinane Castle ... a figure which holds objects, now hardly identifiable, raised in each hand” [Andersen 1977: 12]. In his catalogue description of the figure he calls her “grim-looking” and states that less attention is paid to display than to the objects, “a slim and pointed shape like a dagger in her right hand and a collar- or sickle-shape in her left hand” [*ibid.*: 149], although he has also stated that these objects are “now hardly identifiable”. Although Andersen does not identify the object in the sheela’s left hand as a ‘lucky horseshoe’, he has clearly been influenced by the original description, for if the objects are now hardly identifiable, from where is he getting his notion of what they might be?

This is a useful demonstration of how original information (which may or may not be correct) may be repeated through time by researchers into the subject. In studying these images, we need to be aware of possibilities of the changes which may have taken place in terms of how the sheelas look, and how the original description itself may be suspect, thus creating misrepresentations.

Andersen adds in a footnote [*ibid.*: 15] that Wright’s [1866] illustrations of sheelas are not necessarily very accurate, appearing to have been made from other people’s sketches. This, again, links in with the repetition of information that may not be accurate, but is continued through time. However, the earlier antiquarian and later drawings play an important part in the identification of lost

sheelas, despite their possible limitations in representing the image as it actually was.

Although much of Andersen's information describing the sheelas is more encompassing than previous attempts, some of his own information is inaccurate. For example, he refers to the sheela at Cashel as being "nowadays preserved in a high window in the larger church on the Rock of Cashel, and by all appearances a grotesque of maybe Jacobean date" [*ibid.*: 16]. It is difficult to know which sheela he is referring to, as there are actually two potential sheelas on the Rock of Cashel. One is still in situ on a quoin stone of the sixteenth century dormitory; the other is highly questionable as to whether it is a sheela at all, but has been called "a relatively late Sheela-na-Gig" by Jack Roberts [Roberts 1995: 23]⁹, and is in the museum on the Rock. This seems the likely contender for Andersen's Cashel sheela. However, despite Andersen referring to it in his text, it is not included in his catalogue.

Andersen states that the quote by Windele [see p. 40, this chapter] dates from about the same time as the preparation of the first RIA catalogue of Irish antiquities, published in 1857, prepared by W.R. Wilde, who chose to use the word 'grotesque' instead of 'sheela-na-gig' – an interesting point which Andersen does not address. The equation of sheelas with the grotesque, or as being part of the grotesque, is a frequent assumption within the literature, particularly popular readings of the subject. I return to the importance of the grotesque in Chapter Four.

The term 'erotic' is one that Andersen frequently applies to his study of sheelas. He discusses the work of Thomas Wright [1866] to support the place of sheelas within the context of "erotic subjects known from art and from popular belief through the ages" [Andersen 1977: 15]. Wright, as I have discussed earlier, was mainly interested in the phallic aspect of representations from the Middle Ages, but also concerned himself with representations of both sexes on medieval

⁹ Roberts has subsequently changed his mind about this figure, for in his latest publication he mentions a "figure with a cat-like head, rotund belly and intertwining legs ... that was previously regarded as a Sheela and can now be seen inside the museum" [McMahon & Roberts 2001: 121].

churches. He interprets the sheelas as being apotropaic, in keeping with the Irish antiquarians' interpretation. Andersen is excessive in his reference to the 'erotic' nature of these images: "the Irish sheelas figure in his [Wright's] book among examples of erotic display with a protective purpose" [Andersen 1977:15]; and: "Thomas Wright was a collector of items illustrating this special aspect of eroticism in the western countries, and from his interpretation of erotic figures on churches in western France he proceeded to illustrate a number of Irish sheelas ..." [*ibid.*: 15].

It is significant to note that Wright himself does not (in the passages quoted by Andersen) use the word 'erotic' at all. What Wright does say is this:

"It is a singular fact that in Ireland it was the female organ which was shown in this position of protector upon the churches, and the elaborate though rude manner in which these figures were sculpted, show that they were considered as objects of great importance. They represented a female exposing herself to view in the most unequivocal manner ... People have given them the name of *Shelagh-na-Gig*, which, we are told, means in Irish Julian the Giddy, and is simply a term for an immodest woman; but it is well understood that they were intended as protecting charms against the fascination of the evil eye."

[Wright 1866: 35-36]

Eroticism, therefore, does not appear to be a relevant theme of interpretation for Wright. I address the idea of the 'erotic' as eros in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Margaret Murray, Edith Guest and Helen M. Roe

The chronological sequence of understanding the sheelas for Andersen reaches the 1920s and 30s, in particular the work of Margaret Murray. Andersen says Murray puts the sheelas and other figures "under various headings ... considered as forms of religious images; types expressive of female aspects from attractive youth, through motherhood, to the hag" [Andersen 1977: 19]. He queries her inclusion of the sheela as a type alongside other more widely accepted types of 'idol': the Divine Young Woman, the Universal Mother, and the Hag associated with death. He rests his query on Mellaart's work at Çatal Hüyük where this

triple division is evidenced, and in “other early civilizations” [*ibid*: 19], and says that the “sheela, documented mainly from Romanesque contexts, never fitted into this survey attempted by Margaret Murray” [*ibid*: 19], although he still feels her arguments are worth recollecting. He does not explain why he feels this, nor does he link her ideas to the Celtic notion of the Triple Goddess, whether this is valid or not, or make any other connections.

Andersen moves on to Edith Guest’s contribution to the understanding of sheelas, particularly referring to the list of sheelas produced in 1936, which he states is a great improvement upon a short catalogue of 1894 in the JRSAL. Guest’s list enabled her to produce a typology based on gestures and postures [see Guest 1936: 109]. Andersen clearly feels more comfortable with the solidity of a typology and list, equating more with a normative archaeology approach, than with Murray’s more esoteric understanding. And, yet, he criticises Guest for her lack of description “as it prevents the reader from really appreciating fundamental points about the carvings, whose *primitive power* [my italics] can only be appreciated from a close observation of their anatomy” [*ibid*.: 20]. He, thus, ascribes ‘primitive power’ to the figures, but does not question how this ‘power’ might be perceived or interpreted by the intended audience. The visibility is an interesting point when a number of the sheelas are too high up the building for any detail to be visible, or even the figure at all in some cases. How would Andersen account for the ‘primitive power’ in these examples? His comments here focus on the anatomy of the figures, viewing the sheelas as objects, and particularly focusing on one body part, the vulva.

Having highlighted the necessity of close observation of the sheelas’ anatomy, he immediately goes on to mention that the “erotic nature of the sheelas has been more closely observed” in recent years. He specifically refers to Vivian Mercier [1962] who “placed the sheelas in the company of drastic female figures known from description, admittedly erotic, in early Irish sagas ... [with] the tradition of the sheela and the hag ... continued into modern times ... [such as] the novels of Samuel Beckett, where some grotesque females play a part in the variously hampered lives of the male figures” [Andersen 1977: 20]. Mercier’s book is entitled ‘The Irish comic tradition’, and the implication here is that Andersen supports the view that the sheelas may be part of a ‘comic tradition’. Do we see

here Andersen's true understanding of the sheela? The female being perceived as having power by the male, but as this is not acceptable to the male she is represented as something grotesque and/or comic in an attempt to deride/devalue/lower the status of/render powerless? Unless Andersen made a link (which he does not) between the comic tradition notion and Bakhtin's [1968] carnival theory of the grotesque, which might be valid for a contemporary Romanesque understanding, the quote that Andersen uses would seem to lay bare his stereotypical heterosexual, modern ethno-centric attitudes.

In his conclusion to this first chapter, Andersen refers to the publication of single sheela examples in antiquarian and archaeological journals, specifically Hutchinson & Hutchinson's [1969] list of the English, Welsh and Scottish figures. However, despite such publications, Andersen draws attention to the view that any further useful work for the understanding of sheelas cannot be achieved. He cites Raftery particularly, who in his 1969 article said that "the most that can be done at the moment is to record the facts as they occur" [Raftery 1969: 93, cited in Andersen 1977: 20]. Whilst Andersen may have been quoting this to give greater value to his own work on the subject, it does not allow for any theoretical application to the sheelas or an understanding of the relationship between how the 'facts' are recorded and the socio-political and personal biases of the researcher.

Themes

My critique so far has focused on Andersen's first chapter. As it is such a rambling text, for the ensuing chapters I will focus on the main points I feel are relevant for this critique.

Folklore and sheelas

Andersen talks about the etymology of the name 'sheela-na-gig', putting great significance on the folkloric aspect of the possible origin for the name. Andersen does not address whether an understanding of meaning is a valid objective, and what difficulties might be attached to such an objective. He appears to assume that the search for meaning is a natural objective. There is also an assumption

that meaning for the sheelas is directly related to their physical characteristics, and that this is sexual and erotic.

Andersen refers to several sheelas at sites linked with water: a mill house (Rosnaree, Co. Meath) and two natural springs or holy wells (Ballyvourney and Castlemagner, both Co. Cork). The mill house sheela is in a secondary position but Andersen sees this as evidence for “folk belief alone accounting for the use or re-use of sheelas” [Andersen 1977: 24], but apart from the previous owner of the mill believing the sheela to represent an “original goddess” [*ibid.*], there is no other evidence upon which to base this assumption, for this sheela anyway. At Ballyvourney, as Andersen clearly accepts that the image represented is a sheela (which I do not) there are far more possible connections. The ‘sheela’ has been incorporated into a modern ritual (performing the pattern – involving saying the Rosary as part of pilgrimage and stopping at various places on site). Although Andersen makes an unsurprising connection of male and female, between the patterns touching the sheela and a round, black stone fixed within a hole in the church wall, he does not validate what the connection actually is. Considering his interest in folklore, it is surprising he has not investigated possible connections with the holy well sites and earlier (or even continuing) pagan or pre-Christian activity.

The ‘sheela’ (again, not actually a sheela in my opinion) at Castlemagner was (is?) rubbed by people visiting the site on Saint Bridget’s Day, who drank the water and rubbed it on their bodies to remedy pain.¹⁰ This is clearly strong evidence for the assimilation of a pagan/pre-Christian ritual into Catholic ritual (the idea of Saint Brigit as Brigid the pagan goddess and connections with water and healing) but again, Andersen does not follow through the possible connection with paganism. The Castlemagner sheela is suggested by Guest (1936) and Du Noyer¹¹ (no date given by Andersen) as being seventeenth century. If this is so, does the figure represent, as part of the ritual, a reaffirming of belief in pre-Christian ideology? Or is she seen through the sacredness of

¹⁰ Andersen’s source for this information is Grove White, J., Historical & topographical notes on Buttevant, 1911, II, pp.112-113. However, see Appendix One, p. 255-7 of this thesis for my recent source regarding the Castlemagner well.

¹¹ Du Noyer, G.V., Antiquarian Sketches, II, Library of the Royal Society of Antiquaries, Dublin. [c. 1835-40.]

being female and the connection with water as a means of accessing the divine – both a Christian and pagan concept?

Display of the genitalia.

Andersen briefly looks at the notion of display of the genitalia as a means of deflecting evil, and again in his final chapter at the ‘power of display’ considers images from non-European contexts. He does not address the concept of apotropaia or what it actually means; rather, ‘warding off the evil eye’ is assumed to be a simple, straightforward idea which, as I later show in this thesis, it most certainly is not.

His conclusions are that some Romanesque images are “suggestive of some psychological repression” [Andersen 1977: 131] and that it is possible to find the motif of the displayed woman “in contexts where it was meant to stimulate associations quite different from those relevant for the medieval carver. In fact it is sometimes totally opposed to the repressive ideas haunting Romanesque sculpture” [*ibid.*]. Andersen is clearly influenced by Freudian psychoanalytic understanding, a product and reflection of nineteenth century western European society, but which he seems to feel is valid in applying to an understanding of twelfth century sculpture. Thus, it is not surprising that referring to serpents, he suggests that for the Romanesque they may have equated with the male member [*ibid.*].

Sheelas and serpents are not found in association, so Andersen’s focus on serpents is redundant unless he is trying to make a (hetero) sexual connection between display and the sheelas. Any other possibilities (such as a non-sexual focus or earlier understandings of the snake as symbol) are not considered.

Sheelas as offensive images

Andersen refers to the defacement of some sheelas. The Castlemagner example has some disfigurement due to continued rubbing as part of modern ritual, which Andersen sees as a positive involvement with the sheela. Other examples, however, have been defaced due to their causing offence, Andersen postulates. He cites several examples: Dowth old church, Bilton-in-Ainsty, and Clonlara. Discussing the Bilton-in-Ainsty sheela, Andersen’s descriptive bias is demonstrated again: “ ... one sheela with enormous ‘hunkers’ but shown in a

fairly moderate state of display. Next to her, however, are the fragments of an obviously more revolting figure, whose one remaining arm and leg indicate a drastic gesture” [Andersen 1977: 27]. The sheela on the old bridge at Clonlara [Rynne 1967] is believed to have come from a nearby castle, and Rynne says it was referred to at times as ‘the witch’s stone’ [Rynne 1967: 221, cited in Andersen 1977: 28]. Andersen sees the connection with witches in stereotypical misogynistic terms, as a negative thing to associate the sheelas with, and that it shows dislike for the image. He seems to be presenting a confused understanding of the representation: that sometimes it represents a positive symbol of a belief (what belief is not clear) and at other times it represents a negative, provocative symbol which has resulted in its mutilation. He thus appears to be equating another simplistic binary opposition with the sheela representations, that they embody the power of good or of evil. He seems to be focusing on the representations’ effect on those viewing them and how this affects their meaning, which means that their meaning is different for different types of viewer. But he does not point this out. And it ignores the question about why some of the sheelas are in unviewable positions on buildings.

The Romanesque Motif

Andersen states that the only way to produce meaningful information about the sheelas is to look at those examples from original, datable contexts, and in so doing he limits any understanding to normative archaeological foundations. He discusses Kilpeck with reference to Shobdon, and supports the diffusionistic notion that ideas for sculptural motifs were brought back to England from the continent, to Shobdon first, and then Kilpeck. This produces a date for Kilpeck of c. 1140-1145, although there is still debate over this; for example, John Hunt stated at a recent conference¹² that some of the dates for the Herefordshire School sculpture are too early, based on stylistic analysis. Hunt says that precise dating is not possible, but the second and third quarters of the twelfth century are generally accepted for the Herefordshire School. Kilpeck and Shobdon have been considered early, although Kilpeck has had revisions in dating, as there was a church at Kilpeck in 1134, when it was given to Gloucester Abbey.

¹² ‘Images of imagination and faith: the Romanesque and its regional Schools in English sculpture’, 22nd January, 2000, Oxford University DCE.

However, for Andersen, this is important in producing a date for the sheela at Kilpeck: “early mid-twelfth century of English Romanesque” [Andersen 1977: 34]. His description of the Kilpeck sheela is in his by-now familiar mode: “There is a determined ugliness about her display, but she is less fierce and menacing than some Irish examples, who crouch on walls all by themselves, mostly on buildings of later date, however” [*ibid.*: 36]. He seems to be trying to say something else here, but does not enlighten us further.

The Irish sheelas in original Romanesque context which Andersen draws attention to are: Clonmacnois, Rath [blathmac], and Leighmore. However, Andersen is incorrect here for, of these three, only one (Liathmore / Leighmore) actually is in original situ: Clonmacnois is not a sheela, and Rath is in secondary situ. In addition, although Clonmacnois is dated to the early 1160s, which Andersen says “must be the earliest ... [of the three] ... as it [the ‘sheela’] is set on a chancel arch in the ... Nuns’ Church, usually dated to the period just prior to the Norman involvement in the Irish struggles” [*ibid.*: 37], he omits to state that this chancel arch was completely restored in the 1860s. We, therefore, cannot rely on the position of the motifs in the arch as being original.

The Clonmacnois figure is important in that it is always referred to as the earliest example of a sheela in Ireland (or ‘proto-type’ by Rynne [1987]). However, Andersen correctly questions the validity of this, as “she does not conform to the usual pattern of seated or half-standing figures in a concentrated state of display, underlined by gesture” [Andersen 1977: 39]. He states these doubts are valid when compared with other Irish figures (presumably other sheelas, although he does not make this clear). However, he then compares her (if indeed it is a ‘she’) with other acrobats from Western France and Normandy as demonstrating exactly the same type of characteristics. He thus appears to be implying a diffusionistic notion, that the idea for this motif in Ireland came from France. Having stated above that he is not convinced that this image is a sheela, he then uses the example as evidence for another sheela in a datable Romanesque context!

Sheelas and other Romanesque images

Andersen demonstrates a very limited understanding of other images in relation to sheelas. Referring to the sheela from Rathblathmac, Co. Clare, which is on the outside of an ornamented panel of serpent heads and foliage on a lintel, he says “she is obviously related to the numerous Romanesque versions of Man Struggling with Beasts” [Andersen 1977: 46]. He again refers to “the Romanesque subject of Man troubled by animals” [*ibid.*], that sometimes “man is seen to succumb” and at others to “hold his own, mastering the animals” [*ibid.*]. Monster-like images represent malevolent forces for Andersen; there is no possibility for him of anything other than a basic interpretation of good versus evil, or as he puts it himself “man in trouble” [*ibid.*: 47], although what kind of trouble he does not enlighten us with. Images of human form represented with other monster-like images are seen as being in conflict, struggling, with each other. The interpretation is, again, seen in binary opposition terms. He interprets certain female representations as monster-like: “man beset by evil in monstrous shapes, the alluring mermaid or siren, and the sheela” [*ibid.*]. At the end of this chapter we are left with a sexist stereotypical linking of concepts: the sheela is female, erotic, evil, and trouble.

Sheelas from France: sculpture and diffusionism

In Andersen’s fourth chapter, he focuses more on the function of Romanesque sculptural form. There are two categories for him: images that centre upon Christ in Glory depicted on the great west fronts of cathedrals and arranged orders of the portals; and images on outside and inside walls, on corbels and capitals, that represent “holy and unholy forces at work” [Andersen 1977: 48]. In simpler terms of reference, I loosely interpret this as the ‘official’ (sanctioned by the Church) and the ‘marginal’ (where sculptors may have had greater freedom for subject matter).

Although Andersen mentions function a few times at the beginning of this chapter, it is actually mainly concerned with presenting information that lends credibility to the supposition that Romanesque motifs moved westwards. It also includes reference to work by other authors who are concerned with Romanesque art and sculpture and who also largely subscribed to a movement of motifs from west to east: Crozet [1948], Zarnecki [1957-58], Henry and

Zarnecki [1958], Foçillon [1963], and Henry [1970]. He describes various images from France, such as acrobats, exhibitionists, and animal or human heads. There is strong emphasis on diffusionism again; referring to decorating arches with animal or human heads, Andersen says: “this phenomenon has a likely origin in the Near East; it developed early in French Romanesque, and from there it passed, around 1135-40, into England” [Andersen 1977: 50]. However, beak-heads are seen as a characteristic English form, whereas the Irish arches are seen to have more connection with the French models, with images such as horses’ heads.

Andersen directly asserts that the sheela motif developed from exhibitionist motifs: “How the sheela figure, with its offensive display of the female parts, may have developed out of the ‘exhibitionists’, is best illustrated from ... the church of Saint-Pierre, Champagnolle (Charente Maritime)” [Andersen 1977: 53]. This example is of a corbel figure, its feet up around its ears, arms wrapped around the thighs under the buttocks, hands gesturing towards the displayed ‘round hole’ that Andersen interprets as representing genitalia. From the photograph, there is no clear indication that this ‘hole’ is genitalia, looking more like an anus. The figure, therefore, can be seen to conform to the general acrobatic style (that is, feet to ears) rather than the sheela. But Andersen wants the figure to be a sheela to fit his model of diffusion. He, similarly, puts forward other examples from pre-mid-twelfth century France which, he says, demonstrate early sheela characteristics, such as squatting and bald-headedness. He particularly refers to an image of a “female monster” [*ibid.*] from Rétaud (Charente Maritime). This, again, can be criticised for trying to make the evidence fit the model, as such images may be interpreted in other ways such as, for example, being more in keeping with the grotesque (as a body of images) than with sheelas.

Contemporary literature and sculpture

In Andersen’s fifth chapter, he attempts to bring together contemporary medieval examples from literature (such as Chrétien de Troyes) and examples of medieval sculpture, presumably to try and find a link between the two in terms of subject matter. Thus, there is ‘the lovers’ as one theme. He also attempts to focus on how women are portrayed in medieval literature, concluding that there

sculpture. The chapter does not clearly state what it is setting out to do, and consequently little understanding of twelfth century sculptural images or representations of women is achieved by it.

In chapter six, he moves on to the broader theme of twelfth century sculptural subjects. He suggests this is particularly valid for studying sheelas as there is no manuscript source material for them. Thus, he says, the best way to look at them is within their context in relation to the other sculptural motifs associated with them. This is possible for the non-Irish sheelas, where they are often found within corbel tables; in Ireland, however, they are frequently found in isolation, which Andersen does not allow for here.

Rather than deal with this 'flaw' in his theory, he simply focuses on corbel tables in this chapter, equating 'good' and 'evil' again with particular images, and suggesting a moral message contained therein. He tries to link twelfth century opinions about women to the sheela motif, that women were denounced (he does not say as what), and that they represented danger in terms of sexual enticement, producing no evidence for these statements. He thus sees sheelas as "although distinct in kind, not necessarily separated from ... other subjects" [*ibid.*: 69], such as mermaids and Luxuriae. He, therefore, begins to merge his categories of 'official' and 'marginal' representations here, without any proper analysis.

The chapter does not analyse twelfth century subjects in any organised form; rather, there is a meandering of tenuous connections.

Early Ireland

Chapter 7 begins by looking at Celtic stone heads, the focus being that Irish sculpted images often feature heads that are large in proportion to the body, and that this represents a continuity of style between pagan and Christian art. Andersen does not see the Irish sheelas, however, as fitting into either Norman tradition or early Irish, but that there may be an "Irish colouring of a Norman motif" [*ibid.*: 76]. He says this accounts for the Irish sheelas' "ugly features; a repellent image drawing upon features associated with heathendom ... made powerful by ominous associations with pagan imagery, never lost from sight in Ireland" [*ibid.*]. There is a strong implication in Andersen's interpretation here

that Ireland is subordinate to England (or the British Isles as he refers to Britain) in terms of 'progress'. He talks of "the phase of Irish Romanesque where backward-looking tendencies meet with an international vocabulary of Romanesque to produce such barbaric portals as the splendid doorway of Saint Brendan's at Clonfert" [*ibid.*]. Whilst it is clear he is referring to architectural and sculptural modes, it is nonetheless implied that the Irish are 'behind in catching up' with the trends, which is in keeping with a diffusionistic interpretation. However, conversely, Andersen also suggests that the Irish sheelas have very early precursors, carvings that resemble sheelas. He cites the figure from Lustymore, Lower Lough Erne, which because it is seated with knees slightly apart and hands possibly folded in the lap, has broad lips and open mouth, he sees as sharing characteristics with sheelas such as the example from Cavan. He does not give a date for the Lough Erne figure, but in any case such suppositions are tenuous.

Tattoos, and the 'pagan or medieval?' question

"Signs of ugliness are consistently found about the sheelas, and as if lean ribs were not repellent enough, the Irish carver might add a tattooed pattern."

[Andersen 1977: 84].

The theme of chapter eight appears to be looking at sheelas that have incised or raised lines on the face and / or body. Andersen interprets these as either tattoos or ribs suggesting emaciation, respectively. Using the Fethard wall sheela as an example, he initially postulates an association with pagan custom in these characteristics, linking the 'Janus' figure from Boa Island in with this idea. This image is of two figures set back-to-back with a depression between their heads which has been interpreted as a space for libations; there is also a chevron-like pattern applied to the sides of each head, which is what Andersen is connecting the two sets of images by. He obviously feels this is highly tenuous as he immediately rejects his own idea saying "there is no real relationship between pagan Irish figure carving of the Boa Island type and the usual seated sheelas" [*ibid.*: 86]. Andersen's bias, however, is clear:

"The distinct traits of emaciation shown by lean ribs, the ugly rows of

teeth, or those shrunken limbs of the sheela are all characteristics showing medieval carvers moving beyond naturalism into caricature, with the apparent aim of producing warped and witch-like looks.”

[Andersen 1977: 86]

He states that the Fethard wall sheela is unquestionably medieval, particularly as it is set within a fragment of fourteenth century town wall. He fails to observe, however, that this sheela is in a secondary position in this wall. He likewise sees the Fethard Abbey sheela as unequivocally medieval, but does not validate this. The Fethard Abbey figure also has striations on its face and indication of ribs. Andersen points out another example of striation marks, on the breasts of the Clonmel sheela. For some undisclosed reason, Andersen ascribes the ‘tattoos’ of these sheelas a medieval context.

Andersen ends this chapter with reference to Anne Ross’s work [1973] in which she ascribes the sheela a territorial or war-goddess role “in her hag-like aspect” as a result of a ‘Celtic’ connection for them. Sheelas are seen by Ross as having an origin connected with Irish literary and mythological heritage (such as Queen Medb of the Ulster Cycle). However, Andersen does not accept this as he feels it is “less easily proved than the possible continental, French origin for the motif” [Andersen 1977: 95]. He does not dispose of it entirely though (keeping his options open) accepting some possibility of Irish myth having an effect on the “Irish colouring of the motif, in a kind of recrudescence, a pagan throw-back similar to ... the examples of tattooing” [*ibid.*].

His unsatisfactory conclusion, therefore, for the question of a pagan or medieval origin for the Irish sheelas, is that the Irish carvers were “aware of pagan imagery and made use of it ... in order to create as powerfully ugly and menacing a figure as possible, intended it would seem for some specific function on buildings” [*ibid.*].

Architectural location

Sheelas by entrances

Andersen points to Guest's information that sheelas from castles in Ireland are often assumed to have come from neighbouring churches. He says that whilst this cannot be recorded as a fact, it is a fact that a number of castle figures in Ireland must be original carvings in their settings, but that "awe" of the subject projects a more ancient association for them. Whatever the origin, he says that church and castle sheelas adopt similar attitudes of display, and the positioning of them by windows, above doors, on quoins, is consistent whichever context they are found in. He, thus, does not address the problem at all of re-use of the image here. He simply focuses on the form of the image.

Andersen refers to the church of St. Michael's at Oxford, which originally had a sheela set high up the wall. He asks the question: why have an apotropaic figure set at a height where it cannot be viewed? This suggests Andersen is not clear-cut about his understanding for sheelas from Ireland or Britain, as he has said earlier that British sheelas were not apotropaic. He cites a possible explanation for the out-of-view sheela from folklorists who suggest the image was protective against lightning. This seems implausible, with no evidence to support it. The sheela is in at least secondary situ, having been inserted into the Anglo-Saxon tower. However, more convincing is the suggestion by Andersen that there may have been a connection between the sheela on the tower and the medieval city wall; he says the sheela must have overlooked the wall and adjacent gateway at some stage. Andersen draws a comparison between the Oxford sheela and the Fethard wall sheela, presumably in terms of apotropaic function, again indicating a blurring of his own categories for sheela function.

Sheelas on quoins

Andersen describes several sheelas on quoins: Doon, and Kiltinane church (now stolen), Clomantagh, Tullavin, Ballyfinboy Castle, Malahide, from Ireland; Fiddington, and Copgrove, from England. He refers to the Irish castle quoin sheelas as 'hags' because of what he sees as a convention of these sheelas: "The castle hags do not depend merely on a show of genitals, and the possible

aggression involved in that. They develop further in a performance of a more muscular kind” [Andersen 1977: 105]. It would be helpful if Andersen justified his statement that a display of the genitals can be construed as ‘aggressive’. Is he linking eroticism (to use his terminology) with aggression, for example, and if so, how and why? The ‘performance of a more muscular kind’ refers to a characteristic of these particular sheelas (as he sees it) of lifting their shoulders “in a general display of power which goes beyond the basic display” [*ibid.*]. Another point to draw attention to is the importance he places upon ‘convention’. Alluding to the Doon figure, he recognizes that her position is not possible in realistic terms to achieve, that is, a female standing up could not “manipulate her genitals with that aim of open display which is a sheela characteristic. Nature may not allow this, but a certain artistic convention in the Irish Middle Ages will. And convention is our key” [Andersen 1977:104]. I question this as evidence for such a convention; it may be that Andersen feels he must categorise.

Sheelas as witches

Andersen also, in this chapter, lets his predisposition towards seeing sheelas as representations of witches become evident through his use of language: the Kiltinane church figure has a “bald head ... resting on a broomstick kind of neck” [*ibid.*: 105]; “the Clomantagh hag, or forbidding witch, as she appears to be ...” [*ibid.*: 106]; “the Ballyfinboy sheela speaks for her whole breed and their ‘magic’ use as mainly apotropaic figures” [*ibid.*: 107]; and that the more difficult-to-see sheelas would only be seen by enemies (mortal or spiritual) when they were nearly upon the image, of which he says “the hide-and-seek suggests belief in magic derived from conventions of Romanesque art, ill understood by the later Middle Ages, and adopted for purposes of witchcraft” [*ibid.*: 108]. This claim by Andersen, which he particularly associates with the sheelas inserted horizontally, needs greater explanation, which he does not provide. He appears to be saying that the earlier apotropaic function was appropriated for later witchcraft use. Interestingly, he himself points to a lost meaning for the sheela from Copgrove church which has been “substituted by assumptions about its pagan origin” [*ibid.*] and this could similarly be true for the Irish sheelas as well.

So, there is confusion related to the links between sheelas, witchcraft, pagan origins, and an earlier apotropaic function that is not concerned with witchcraft but a “belief in magic”. This is an area I explore further later in this chapter.

In his summing up of this chapter, Andersen appears to differentiate between sheelas and ‘hags’, hags being those sheelas found on castles in Ireland which he sees as displaying more than genitals but “a show of force, of muscular power, expressed in broad shoulders, square neck, and those curiously open arm-pits which are the result of pulling one’s shoulders up” [*ibid.*: 112].

He also puts forward the possibility that medieval Irish sheelas may have had a corbel function. He bases this on three pieces of ‘evidence’:

- 1) a figure reputed to have come from somewhere around Birr, Offaly, acquired in the 1950s by the National Museum, Dublin. This vague provenance is based upon the tradition believed by the family who gave the image to the museum. On the basis of this vague assertion, Andersen surmises that it is evidence for sheelas once existing on castles in the Birr area;
- 2) another figure (owned by Thomas Lalor Cooke, author of a history of Birr town, but no reference given by Andersen) which Andersen says has features which make it a possible corbel. Andersen implies he has seen this figure, as the ‘features’ are not discernible from the museum photograph, but he does not make it clear where this figure is now;
- 3) at O’Gara’s Fortress, Sligo, the corbels have ‘related motifs’, “one of them looking like a dancer or a figure with one leg raised up high in the air” [*ibid.*: 112].

This tenuous evidence is not, I think, sufficient to support the possibility of a corbel function for sheelas in Ireland.

The last of the sheelas / Gestures and attributes

These two chapters sit uneasily together – the former is an end-trajectory piece for the ‘evolution’ of the image; the latter would be better placed at the beginning of the book, as it describes general and specific characteristics of what a sheela is, at least for Andersen:

“The basic attitude of a sheela implies concentrated reference to her sex. Threat and aggression seem to emanate from this display ... significant gesture of the hands directed towards the lower abdomen ... impossible in

naturalistic terms but an efficient means of concentrating the spectator's attention upon the vulva."

[Andersen 1977: 120]

Apart from this emphasis on the vulva, Andersen refers to other gestures occasionally found on some figures "which suggest secondary meanings, associated with that fundamental exposure of the genitals" [*ibid.*: 120]. He is not entirely clear about these other gestures and attributes: facial expressions, head-gear and objects wielded are referred to in a general sense. He links these in with an apotropaic, and possibly fertility, function(s). He suggests a division between the 'erotic' display / emphasis on the vulva, and other gestures (such as a hand by the ear) which may be not as "strange", that is, signifying listening or concentrated attention. He sees the feature of the 'knitted brow' in similarly simplistic, one-dimensional terms: that it is "an expression of internal unrest and a mental state of unease" [*ibid.*: 124].

Returning to the previous chapter ('The last of the sheelas'), he starts with a synopsis of what he has said so far about the evolution of the image: sheelas are a product of the twelfth century, "originating in western France and Normandy, gaining independence in Norman England and winning special favour in medieval Ireland" [*ibid.*: 113]. The Irish castle sheelas are Norman but "with features very much like some drastic, mythological figure out of the remote Irish past" [*ibid.*]. He sees the background for the Irish development in the "so-called Gaelic recovery" beginning at the end of thirteenth century, thus supporting a notion of fusion between Gaelic and Norman. This fusion affected literature and, says Andersen, no doubt the sheela motif as well, with added elements to the Norman motif of superstition and magic practices. He sees the sheela image linked in with literary mythological representations of women as hags, wily women, war-loving queens.

Andersen sees a change occurring in the later representations of sheelas, after about AD1500. They lose their "distinctive qualities" and "sheela-like motifs appear in a manner which indicates some loss of belief in the original image" [*ibid.*: 114]. He sees other images being brought into use, other types of nudes which do not "conform to the sheela pattern" [*ibid.*] (by which he means "that

basic repertoire of display ... [and] expressly defined by their erotic exhibition" [*ibid.*], the powerful displaying of the genitals).

He sees a 'weakening' of the image becoming apparent with these so-called later sheelas. He cites the Clenagh Castle sheela as such an example, calling her a "cartoon". However, it is also true that late examples exist which do 'conform' to Andersen's 'sheela pattern'. This does not fit with Andersen's conjecture that after about 1500, "some figures suggest that the sheela was becoming a caricature of her former self" [*ibid.*]. Again, I see this as representing Andersen's attempt to make the evidence 'fit' – to see a pattern of sheela evolution and decline. Such 'evidence' includes the Bunratty sheela which he sees as a transitional example "approaching the skeletons and emaciated men in shrouds on funerary monuments of Jacobean date" [*ibid.*: 116]. This inevitably leads Andersen on to the 'sheela' at Kildare Cathedral, found on a sixteenth century tomb. Despite acknowledging John Hunt as the identifier of this image as a sheela, Andersen appears reluctant to actually call her one, saying "we have moved out of the sheela tradition at this date ... [with] lack of reference to the genitals and the decorative treatment of the pubic hair" [*ibid.*: 118]. But he does not state that she should not be included as a sheela, presumably because she fits into his hypothesis of the changing image at this later date, comparing the Kildare example with that at Castlemagner which is suggested as being seventeenth century.

Summary of Andersen

Andersen's study reaches a number of conclusions:

1. Sheelas in Britain are found on corbel tables (which is untrue – most are not)
2. They have a moral guidance role
3. and are not pagan in origin
4. Sheelas in Ireland are not found on corbel tables
5. They have an apotropaic rather than moral role
6. and probably have a pagan origin.
7. For both geographical locations, Andersen sees sheelas as menacing, ugly manifestations of monstrous females, and he does not have an answer for

their specific function

8. Function, therefore, is seen as an important issue to address by Andersen.

Andersen grapples with trying to associate function with meaning for the sheelas, without exploring the theoretical implications. He says “most sheelas seem to have had a function on some building” [Andersen 1977: 102], that is, either apotropaic or as moral reminders. His understanding of meaning is, therefore, defined by use. He is not able to find a connection between a fertility function and the positioning of sheelas by doors and windows of buildings, although he can for an apotropaic function. It would seem, therefore, that he has not researched into the possibility of any symbolic meanings or associations.

However, Andersen’s work was a milestone in research into sheela-na-gigs. He attempted a study which included their description, cataloguing, and placement within a European Romanesque context. There is some attempt to understand meaning but only in relation to function. He feels there is a need (derived from his diffusionist vision) to give sheelas a place amongst world imagery of female ‘erotic’ representations, but his fixed ideas about female imagery and lack of exploration of symbolism and myth result in a one-dimensional and extremely limited interpretation. As a corpus it is useful; but as an academic study it fails, and even as a popular text it confuses.

Etienne Rynne

Like Andersen, Rynne also hypothesises that sheelas demonstrate continuity from the pagan to the Christian period. In his ‘A pagan Celtic background for sheela-na-gigs?’ (1987 but based on an earlier article of his from 1979), Rynne proposes that sheelas are “unequivocably [*sic*] medieval in date, being generally found associated with late churches and tower houses” [1987: 189], but that “prototypes” exist from the pagan Celtic Iron Age, some associated with a fertility cult. (Although he refers to a link with a fertility cult, there is no mention of any connection with Margaret Murray’s theories.) He suggests that these “proto-sheelas” then became related or fused with a male ‘Lord of the Animals’ figure of similar Celtic background, which he says accounts for the medieval protection aspect and also for the absence of distinctive breasts. He tries to find precursors to the sheela-na-gig ‘style’ and sees the vulva and squatting

characteristics being indicators of this, citing the Rheinheim gold armlet which is fifth to fourth century BC. The connection apparently is the “prominent breasts and hands grasping or touching what appears to be intended as her vulva, much in the manner of many sheela-na-gigs of later date” [Rynne 1987: 190]. This figure has been called a Celtic Artemis or ‘mistress of the wild beasts’ and thus Rynne sees connections with fertility and childbirth. The squatting connection is made via what Rynne calls the “earliest representation of a squatting ‘Lord of the Animals’ figure” [Rynne 1987: 191], the so-called Cernunnos figure on the first-century BC Gundestrup cauldron.¹³ The connection is made purely on the position of the legs. Rynne also takes a Freudian view (referring to work by Freud on dream analysis: Rynne 1987: 191]) of the snake that the figure is holding, stating that it “can be thought of as symbolic of a phallus” [*ibid.*] and, therefore, makes yet another fertility connection. The unlikely outcome suggested by Rynne is that the two representations somehow became fused or confused by the pagan Celts and we end up in the twelfth century with the sheela-na-gig, this being made possible by the non-arrival of the Romans in Ireland, allowing the survival and continuation of pagan beliefs into the Christian period. The sheela is seen in evolutionary terms being created from these two early “cult figures” [*ibid.*] and culminating in the full-blown sheela of medieval times, with various figures of “indeterminate sex which seem to be in the same general tradition” [*ibid.*] in between.

Rynne is looking for an ultimate origin for the sheela-na-gig. He adheres to a highly normative, diffusionistic and evolutionary approach, entrenched in andro- and phallo-centric bias. He is also not accurate in his assessment of sheelas, saying that Ireland possesses perhaps only two Romanesque sheelas at Ratoo, Co. Kerry, and Rathblathmac, Co. Clare. This excludes the example at Liathmor, Co. Tipperary, which is in original twelfth century situ, and includes the example from Rath which is in at least secondary situ!

Rynne’s conclusion to his article sums up his limited and blinkered approach: he stresses that we should simply accept the argument, proposed in his paper, of a continuity of a pagan tradition as represented by the sheelas, and believe that “when the true Sheela concept reached Ireland in the twelfth century, along with

¹³ See Kaul et al. [1991] for an up-to-date discussion of the Gundestrup cauldron and its possible provenance.

new Romanesque and Anglo-Norman ideas, it found a prepared and fertile soil – the Irish merely adapted their pagan-derived cross-legged figure to the newly-introduced Sheela motif and then forged ahead with renewed enthusiasm and gusto, producing more and better Sheela-na-gigs than anyone else” [Rynne 1987: 199]. Problems he does not address are:

- 1) Sheelas not in original situ may have come from a much earlier context
- 2) Most of the sheelas are not in original context
- 3) How does he account for possible sean-na-gigs, or androgynous examples (such as at Fethard Abbey)? They must surely have a different evolutionary origin from his own proposed one for sheelas
- 4) If some of the Irish sheelas are earlier than twelfth century, the effect of Continental influences arriving in the twelfth century would be less easy to discern, and a diffusionistic approach is less acceptable. Perhaps the Irish would be able to produce the sheela motif without such an influence. Rynne does not allow for this.

Weir and Jerman

Weir & Jerman’s work [1986] is usually referred to by other authors who have written about sheela-na-gigs post-1986, which is why I include it in this critique. The main thrust of Weir & Jerman’s argument is to categorise sheela-na-gigs with other ‘sexual’ carvings, focusing heavily on a didactic sexual interpretation – that the carvings were a “lesson in stone for the illiterate” [Weir & Jerman 1986: 8]. They describe the “other” carvings (presumably sheelas) as “immodest, obscene even, to modern eyes” [*ibid.*].

Their descriptive language reflects an androcentric, ethnocentric (and, it could be argued, repressed) bias:

“the sculptor at times relegated these acts [anal display and sodomy] to apes and other animals, as if he found the subjects too coarse for humans, but he did not shrink from showing megaphallic men, one with his penis in his mouth. On window capitals of this church, acrobats with huge genitals cavort with feet-to-ears females, one of whom shows off her sex in the most outrageously explicit manner” [*ibid.*: 9].

They are thus biasing the reader and influencing a masculinist and evolutionary interpretation: humans are at the top of the (moral) evolutionary tree and therefore do not engage in acts like sodomy; and it is “outrageous” of the female to display her genitals as described above, but not considered to be so for the male who has his own huge penis in his mouth!

Weir & Jerman suggest the sheelas have been interpreted by some as vestigial idols of ancient pre-Christian fertility religion, and represent ancient powers associated with popular magic. They do not necessarily subscribe to these views, wishing to “keep within the proper confines of art history” [*ibid.*: 10], and are not interested in exploring folklore or comparative religion.

Weir & Jerman propose to show that sheelas (and allied exhibitionists) are arguably iconographic images the purpose of which was to give visual support to the Church’s moral teaching. They believe them to be contemporary and of a piece with other Romanesque carvings, regardless of “any distant origins which may have played a part in their make-up” [*ibid.*].

Weir & Jerman aim “to show that sexual exhibitionists developed (like many Romanesque motifs) from Classical prototypes at a date not earlier ... than the 11th century ... [flourishing] during the 12th century; that they are Christian carvings, part of an iconography aimed at castigating the sins of the flesh, and that in this they were only one element in the attack on lust, luxury and fornication; that their horrible appearance is due to the fact they portrayed evil in the battle against evil; [and that] they flourished in the sculpture of western France and northern Spain” [*ibid.*: 15-17] and reached the British Isles later.

Their proposition is therefore one of diffusionism which Andersen also stated and Weir & Jerman endorse.

It would seem, however, that sheelas are being categorised in the same group as all other ‘sexual exhibitionist’ carvings of the period. The proposition by Andersen is that sheelas ‘arrived’ along with other motifs from France and the continent to enrich the British carvers’ repertoire. Weir & Jerman’s further fieldwork (i.e. after Andersen’s) adds more numbers of exhibitionists and “many

other figures allied to them by their sexual display or attributes” [*ibid.*: 17]. Clearly then sheelas are lumped together with all these other carving styles just on the basis of displaying genitalia. Again, a masculinist/non-feminist approach, primarily focusing on genitals to categorise.

Weir & Jerman stretch this category even further by including figures which they say, although not explicitly displaying genitalia (e.g. grimacers, tongue-protruders, beard-pullers), by their proximity to the ‘sexual exhibitionists’ were seen by “medieval man” as having a sexual connotation. There is no other support for this argument than Weir & Jerman’s own opinion. They then use their self-created, broadened category to state that these other figures “swell the number of carvings ...united in a vast endeavour to create a sermon in stone” [*ibid.*: 18].

BUT ... sheela-na-gigs are quite often found not associated with other figures; they are usually alone, frequently (particularly in Ireland) on churches or tower houses which have no other architectural embellishment. I do not see them as part of one big category of all exhibitionists. It is more complicated than this.

Conleth Manning

Manning’s 1988 article focuses on one sheela-na-gig at Ballinaclogh, Co. Tipperary. This is another sheela, additional to the example I have recorded at Ballinaclogh Castle [see Appendix 2].

Manning’s main points in this article are:

- 1) that the term ‘sheela-na-gig’ should be “confined to ‘late medieval female exhibitionists typically found on tower houses in certain parts of Ireland’”, [Feehan 1982: 45, cited by Manning 1988: 72];
- 2) he adopts an apotropaic function explanation for sheelas both on tower houses and churches (although those on churches he terms ‘exhibitionists’ rather than sheelas);
- 3) he divides exhibitionist female figures from churches in Ireland into two groups:
 - a) “those of twelfth century date and Romanesque style which generally form part of a larger scheme of decoration”, and

- b) “sheela-na-gigs proper in prominent external locations on the church”
[Manning 1988: 72].

I include Manning in this critique because he is quite clear-cut in his dating of sheelas (late medieval) as opposed to exhibitionists (earlier images). However, as well as not defining what a sheela ‘is’, he is also not clear about their function, for he says “the sheela-na-gigs on churches should be seen as defensive features ... necessitated by the danger of raids” [*ibid.*: 72] during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, this theory cannot be applied to earlier churches that have sheelas, and Manning, therefore, has not accounted for this, despite citing the Rochestown sheela as being one of the earliest examples from a church, although he confusingly ascribes earlier sheelas an apotropaic function to ‘ward off evil’. Does this mean, therefore, that he sees all sheelas on churches as being apotropaic? He also ascribes sheelas on tower houses (which are fifteenth century and later) a defensive function. This means that for Manning all the later fifteenth and sixteenth century sheelas definitely have this function, and possibly earlier ones too. No other function is put forward by Manning.

Eamonn P. Kelly

Kelly [1996] attempts to address the study of sheela-na-gigs in his short book, produced for the National Museum of Ireland. He supports a didactic approach for the sheelas, seeing them as part of the Romanesque repertoire of exhibitionist figures, as Weir & Jerman do. Kelly focuses, naturally, on the Irish sheelas in particular, supporting a diffusionistic view that images, or ideas for images, were brought back to Ireland by pilgrims (such as Irish kings and prominent churchmen) visiting Rome or Santiago de Compostela.

Kelly is really repeating what has already been said about sheelas. However, he does point out that the tower houses are unique to Ireland – that they were an internal architectural development. But he does not then lead on to the significance of why sheelas were placed upon these unique buildings of Ireland. Clearly there was ‘something else going on’ here, as there are no parallels elsewhere in the British Isles. He reverts to safe ground by saying that the “vast majority of true sheela-na-gigs found in Ireland appear to date to the period after the Norman invasion” [Kelly 1996: 13].

Much of his booklet focuses on description of the sheelas, and in this he, like most of the previous authors, refers to sheelas as “grotesque, hideous and ugly” [*ibid.*: 35]. Kelly puts forward that, whilst it is true the sheelas “have come to be regarded as having beneficial powers to assist fertility, these beliefs appear to be of relatively recent folk origin” [*ibid.*: 38].

Commenting on the position of the sheelas on buildings, Kelly deduces that the argument for re-use of sheelas from church sites subsequently being inserted horizontally into quoins (particularly of tower houses), is not valid as there are also examples of horizontally-inserted sheelas on churches (for example, at Kiltinane church, Co. Tipperary).

Kelly’s conclusions are limited. He dates sheelas by the buildings they are found on to between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. He sees a possible change over time in the perceived meaning and function of sheelas, with their primary function on churches being as “invocations against lust” [*ibid.*: 45]. When they were placed on later medieval secular buildings, he sees them as having an apotropaic function. This is in line with Andersen’s view.

Kelly is unusual in that he is the first male author to mention female sexuality in connection with sheela-na-gigs. He says that “in a European feudal context, the function of sheela-na-gigs was one which portrayed a negative view of women’s sexuality, but the evidence suggests that this view was not fully endorsed by the native Irish or, later, by the gaelicised Anglo-Irish” [*ibid.*]. He here refers to pre-Christian goddess cults and their links with agriculture and productivity. But this is not convincing as he has earlier said that any fertility connections with sheelas are likely to be of recent origin. He is, therefore, simply saying that the Irish probably had a different view of female sexuality and it was more likely to be a positive one. He links this in with his final comments about sheelas, that they are powerful images and that “contemporary interest tends to lay stress on the positive aspects of female sexuality and, in particular, on the reproductive function” [*ibid.*: 46]. Unfortunately, he does not back this up with any examples or references. He does, however, state that this view is more in keeping with “the classical models out of which the sheela-na-gigs arose than ... with the exhibitionist figures carved in European male-dominated feudal society” [*ibid.*].

This suggests that Kelly accepts the origins for the sheela-na-gig image being Romanesque in the true sense of the term. He also mentions the notion that sheelas in Ireland have been redefined over time, which is an interesting idea which I hope to develop further.

In conclusion, then, Kelly largely reiterates what has already been written about sheelas by Andersen, and Weir & Jerman. He does, however, shine a slightly new light on how they are viewed by referring a) to female sexuality at all, and b) to how they are perceived in the contemporary world. On the negative side, he is still entrenched in the ethno- and andro-centric vocabulary of describing the sheelas, and a normative view of needing to find a function for them.

Jack Roberts

Roberts is an Irish author who has entered the literature on sheela-na-gigs fairly recently with an illustrated guide book (c.1995 – no publication date is given), and an illustrated map of the sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland [1997]. He has also recently written a book [2001], with Joanne McMahon, subtitled 'The divine hag of the Christian Celts', which is a closely similar title to Anne Ross's article title 'The divine hag of the pagan Celts' [1975], although he does not do this in reference to her work of that title. Roberts' guide and map are popular publications, but contain a great deal of inconsistencies and inaccuracies about the location and description of the sheelas.

Roberts' main points about sheelas

- 1) He sees the sheelas as "religious carvings of women, special women, the symbolical representation of femininity and/or actual female deities or Goddesses" [Roberts 1995: 3]. He carries this notion even further by saying sheelas are "directly related to earlier Goddess/Fertility figurines and the Goddess symbolism of the early pre-historic and Celtic periods" [*ibid.*]. He has no idea how old the tradition is, however, so it is difficult to know how he can make such a bold assertion.
- 2) He does not think sheelas were warnings against lust as:
 - a) not all the sheelas are the same in 'grotesqueness'; some, he feels are not 'grotesque' at all. He is, however, using a modern western stereotypical male

- view of interpretation of what is considered attractive or not in a female, and then matching this up with the representation;
- b) if they are warnings against the sins of the flesh, why have people gone to the trouble of removing or defacing them? Roberts thinks that the most pious thing would have been to leave them alone, if that was their purpose.
 - 3) He refers to Weir & Jerman's [1986] work and that they list "only two examples of male 'exhibitionist figures' ... in Ireland, and none on mainland Britain" [Roberts 1995: 7]. Yet, on the continent, says Roberts, the male figure is the main constituent of Romanesque art, which he argues then is another reason why the sheelas can be seen to be a "separate class of figure distinct from direct Romanesque influence" [*ibid.*]. However, his assessment of male figures being the main constituent of Romanesque art on the continent is not well founded. His point that "male figures in Britain and Ireland are not found in quite the same context as sheela-na-gigs ... these exhibitionist figures have a different context and meaning" [*ibid.*], is a more valid one.

Roberts refers to other authors such as Rynne, Andersen, and Weir & Jerman. He himself particularly favours a link between sheelas and astronomical symbolism, citing the Ballynacarriga sheela which has a crescent around her right eye, and which Roberts says "establishes the symbolic context of the figure" [Roberts 1995: 13]. He sees the crescent around her eye and the roundness of her vulva depicting her as a solar/lunar deity. He says the use of astronomical symbolism is found in association with other sheelas and may be an aspect of them all. I find this difficult to accept, particularly when he cites the Balinderry Castle sheela which he says "is shown surrounded by specifically Goddess oriented designs, three circles with the geometrical expressions of the moon phases (3 divisions) and the solar year (8 divisions) and a geometric design known as the 'marigold' which expresses the 6 & 12 fold division representing both the earth, the planets and the 12 fold division of the zodiac" [*ibid.*]. The symbols associated with this sheela may date it to a later period of Celtic revivalism; as Roberts considers the importance of the circular motif as an essential aspect of Celtic art, one assumes he is agreeing with Rynne in saying that sheelas have a pagan Celtic background. But if such symbolism is associated in his best example with a much later sheela, then this surely calls

into question his argument. It may even be possible that the symbols have been added to the sheela later, when just such associations were considered appropriate, but not necessarily authentic to the original sheela motif.

McMahon and Roberts' most recent publication [2001] is an updated version of the 1995 guide, being also an illustrated guide to the sheela-na-gigs of Ireland and Britain.

Stella Cherry

Cherry has written 'A guide to sheela-na-gigs' [1992] which was produced for an exhibition held at the National Museum of Ireland. She is the curator of Cork public museum, and has also written an article [1993] specifically about sheela-na-gigs in County Cork.

The 1992 guide contributes little to our understanding of the figures, consisting of five paragraphs of text, positing the same arguments as before, namely that their origins are from the continent, and that their possible function was: 1) Christian didactic (warning against the sins of the flesh); 2) as part of a fertility cult and that they thus represent a fertility goddess; 3) apotropaic (warding off evil).

Cherry gives a useful series of lists, however:

- sheela-na-gigs in situ
- exhibitionist figures weathered or badly damaged, probably sheelas
- sheela-na-gigs in museums
- exhibitionist figures, probably sheelas, only a record of which survives
- exhibitionist figures, several of which have been mistakenly identified as sheelas

She also provides a useful bibliography, which necessarily updates Andersen's.

In her 1993 article, she states that the most recent catalogue of sheela-na-gigs was Andersen's [1977]. She says he lists 10 figures from Co. Cork, and does not include the figure from Kinsale catalogued earlier by Guest (1936). Since 1977, Cherry says a further 3 sheelas have been discovered at Aghadoe, Glanworth, and Ringaskiddy; but of the 14 figures recorded from Co. Cork, only 9 now

remain. The Ballyvourney figure, Cherry says, is not possible to fully determine whether or not it is a sheela, as it is now incomplete, with its lower half missing and its arms folded across the body. She thus classes it as a possible sheela. Of the 8 remaining figures, Cherry says 3 are definitely not sheelas: Castlemagner, Kinsale and Tracton. The Castlemagner figure Cherry describes as in the orant position, i.e. “‘a person in prayer standing with hands extended and raised skywards’ (Roe 1970)” [Cherry 1993: 111], and that it probably dates to the later medieval period at the earliest, although orans date back to the seventh or eighth century. The Kinsale figure appears unfinished, but it is unlikely that it was ever intended to be a sheela as it stands upright with its arms by its sides. The Tracton figure she dismisses as a sheela as it appears (particularly in earlier photographs, e.g. O’Riordain 1944) to be clothed in a tunic and may be carrying a weapon.

Thus, 5 sheelas are left from Co. Cork: Aghadoe, Ballynacarriga, Castle Widenham, Glanworth, and Ringaskiddy. Only Ballynacarriga is still in situ.

Cherry’s definition of a sheela-na-gig is: “a medieval stone carving of a naked female exposing her genital area. A typical sheela has a large, bald head and a lean torso; breasts when present, are usually small and ribs are sometimes indicated. Figures can be in a sitting or upright position with one or both hands indicating or clutching at the vulva” [Cherry 1993: 107]. She also says they are mostly found on churches and tower-houses where they are placed high up on the walls, usually about 30-45 feet from the ground. A few examples, she says, are also found on pillars, gateposts, bridges and mills. (I think, in actual fact, there is only one example each on a pillar, gatepost and mill.)

Thus, in summary, Cherry does not add any new understanding to a study of sheela-na-gigs. She perhaps adds to the clarification of numbers and presentation of those in lists, but other than this her assessment is rather detached, relying on, but not necessarily supporting, what other authors have said, whilst also not putting forward any new ideas.

Other articles

This critique of the literature on sheela-na-gigs is not exhaustive. There are many smaller articles, and letters in 'Correspondence' about the subject, which I have included in Appendix Three (specific bibliography on sheelas).

I mention three last authors whose articles are of interest and who are not mentioned in McMahon & Roberts (the most recent 'survey' of sheelas).

James H. Dunn

Written and published in 1977, it would appear that Dunn's article was produced without access to Andersen's confusing tome. This is an Irish article, written by an Irishman, about Irish sheelas. The main theme of the article is Dunn's support of sheelas (or 'sílí', plural of 'síle') as apotropaic devices, corresponding to the similar portrayal of women found in old Irish literature. This image is the symbolic woman who both terrorises and protects, and whose link with the land in myth goes back to notions of early fertility goddesses. He thus sees sheelas as similar to the Mórrígan, Ériu, Mór, Medb, and Cathleen Ní Houlíhan. This is also similar to the stance that Sheridan & Ross take. Dunn interestingly also discusses the Medusa, but only in terms of her as a destructive / protective symbol, seeing the foundation of the Medusa myth within concepts of her as a goddess of fertility and vegetation. He does not, however, explain how the gorgon idea works apotropaically. He sees the sheela in the same terms but does not directly relate Medusa with sheelas. Dunn is only looking at sheelas in Ireland, and I question whether his suggestions of the goddess/woman-seen-as-the-land and protectress of it actually works for Britain. As sheelas are found in quite different locations in Britain compared to Ireland [see Chapter Two, this thesis, Fig. 15 c & d], I think it does not apply to Britain.

Barbara Freitag

Freitag's [1999] article gives a good resumé of sheela-na-gig study, identifying three main theories about sheelas as figures representing 1) lust or fertility, 2) childbirth, 3) a Celtic goddess. Freitag's article does not really add anything new to our understanding of sheelas, apart from her section on the name 'sheela-na-gig', which is most interesting. She provides us with information regarding the

use of the name. It was already in use by at least 1781 because there was a British Navy vessel called 'Shelanagig' which was captured in that year (James O'Connor [1991] also mentions this); there are, however, ten different versions of the spelling of the name in various naval documents, mostly spelling it 'Sheilanagig', but also 'Shell-in-a-gig' or 'Shelin-a-gig'. Interestingly, Freitag says that nowhere is it recorded at this time as being spelt with hyphens with the 'na' or 'ni' element which would suggest an Irish link.

She also puts forward that it is not an Irish-derived term at all. This is on the basis of the 'gig' portion of the word, which all variations of the spelling have in common, and the 'gig' part also means it is not derived from 'gCíoch' or 'giob'. Rather, Freitag says, it is more likely to be of Scottish or English origin, where 'gigg', 'gig', or 'geig' in slang means pudenda. In northern England and Scotland 'gig' also meant a 'loose woman', but also denoted anything that whirled or spun, a jig.

This accounts for the 'gig' portion of the word but what of the 'sheela' part? Freitag states that the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* lists a word '*S(c)hell* (also *schele*, *scheill*)' which meant "the female pudendum, viewed as the target of sexual desire" [Freitag 1999: 67]. She suggests that all three possible meanings – dance, woman, pudenda – are all interconnected in terms of "fertility or sacred significance for the peasantry" [*ibid.*: 68].

However, I am not convinced that the Irish 'síle' does not have greater significance for an understanding of that part of the name, where the 'sí' part is important, linking notions of 'fairy woman' or of the 'Otherworld' ('síd' or 'síde') with the *bean sí* or 'banshee'.¹⁴ My further arguments in Chapter Four of this thesis also support this understanding of 'síle'.

At the time of final production of my thesis, a new book by Barbara Freitag on sheela-na-gigs was published [2004]. It would appear that the core of the book is an expanded version of her earlier article on the name 'sheela-na-gig', and this part of her book, like the article, is well researched. However, the rest of the book appears to be of limited use.

¹⁴ See Lysaght [1986] for more on the banshee.

Freitag presents the three main aims of her book (rather inappropriately, in her conclusion) as being 1) to critically review all the literature on the subject, 2) to put forward a new hypothesis, and 3) to complement the corpus of sheelas [2004: 119]. I would suggest, however, that her work fails to deliver on all three points: glaring omissions in her bibliography suggest the absence of a thorough literature review (including, for example, some important sheela-specific or related articles and books such as Sheridan & Ross [1975], Aston [1979], Counihan [1992], Ashdown [1993], Lundgren & Thurlby [1999], Karkov [2001], and McMahon & Roberts [2001]); her 'new' hypothesis is basically another version of the fertility goddess and/or childbirth associations put forward by previous authors (for example, Murray [1934], Sheridan & Ross [1975], Roberts 1995); and her corpus contains inaccurate data due to the inclusion of non-sheela figures (for example those at Darley Dale, Abson, Diddlebury, Royston, and Castlemagner) which have entered the literature from earlier, uncontested and incorrect sources.

Whilst admitting that she is neither an archaeologist nor an art historian, she feels that as a non-specialist, using a "broad-brush" interdisciplinary approach, she is able to look at the "wider implications of the context in which the Sheela-na-gigs are preserved, the reasons why they were preserved and the function they fulfilled" [2004: 119]. However, I would argue that Freitag is a specialist in that her book has an underlying literature-derived emphasis - not surprising, as her research interests are all literature-related. Her interest in sheelas appears to have stemmed initially from the origins of the name. Despite alerting us to the need for understanding context Freitag has not provided a proper analysis of the context(s) for sheelas at all. Rather, she has focused on her assumption that sheelas are connected with childbirth, and then looked into material related to childbirth from the medieval and other periods. She has then brought in connections with folklore, the goddess and fertility. A lack of in-depth analysis of the material is evident yet the archaeological and art historical contexts are vital to sheela interpretations, as are the wider medieval spiritual and social contexts. There is a difference between a 'broad-brush' approach and using carefully chosen and applied interdisciplinary thought and method, and I do not think Freitag has done either.

Catherine E. Karkov

Karkov [2001] sets the two goals of her essay as: 1) “to explore the possible meanings and functions of sheela-na-gigs within their original medieval setting” (although she fails in this, I feel, in not defining what their ‘original medieval setting’ is), and 2) “to consider the ways in which they have been interpreted and reinterpreted in modern times” [2001: 313].

She sees sheelas as having developed out of a Continental context “but have been changed over the centuries into representations of a distinctly Irish past” [*ibid.*]. She unequivocally accepts that the sheelas “began life in Ireland as an Anglo-Norman import” [2001: 315], and sees them as representing the sin of lust. Karkov would therefore appear to be endorsing Weir & Jerman’s andro-, ethno- and hetero-centric view of sheelas, resulting in what can only ever be a limited interpretation.

Karkov says the “main message of the sheela-na-gigs lies in the open threatening body” [2001: 315] with the figures frequently combining “clear gender signifiers (the vulva) with signs of genderless ambiguity (monstrous faces, bald heads, skeletal torsos)” [*ibid.*]. Karkov appears to be making the mistake of equating gender definition with genitalia.

Karkov feels that sheelas originally represented ‘unruly lust’ as indicative of the Irish population’s native ‘barbarianism’ pre-invasion, but that during the thirteenth century their meaning began to shift resulting in their being viewed as an apotropaic icon. This does not make sense, for if the sheelas are an indigenous production then their creators would not define them according to invaders’ terminology. That is, those who created these figures would not have seen them as representing ‘unruly lust’ or ‘barbarianism’ both of which are only appropriate when used by an outsider using their own cultural / political paradigms. They are the terms used by a potential invader who wants to overpower and who sees themselves as superior.

In a similar vein to Dunn, Karkov rests much of her article on the use of literature and Irish myths in connection with sheelas, whereby can be found images of strong, often sexually aggressive women (thus, Karkov must view sheelas as sexually aggressive – despite this not being evident from the imagery itself: exposure of vagina does not necessarily equate with being sexual, and/or aggressive), and all connected in some way with control or protection of land and/or kingship. That Karkov sees sheelas as in some way sexual is not to be

and/or kingship. That Karkov sees sheelas as in some way sexual is not to be doubted. She implies that sheelas' being ugly is linked to their representing unsatisfied sexual longing, as with the legend of the barren crone who becomes transformed into a fertile beauty after sex with the future king. This allegory of the land could also be interpreted as a marriage of wisdom with fertility as represented by these two aspects of womanhood, both of which the future king requires. 'Ugliness' is not relevant, being both subjective and socially determined, and is not a necessary part of this allegory.

However, Karkov accepts that a single interpretation of sheelas through literary texts is neither broad enough nor appropriate for a visual image, but she does see sheelas as associated with land and power, and that the structures they are found on – "castles, churches, town walls – are ... the architecture of authority" [2001: 319]. This is only a partial understanding, however, for it ignores the aspect of the re-use of the image. In other words, sheelas found on town walls and some churches are not necessarily in primary situ – thus, their original situ may not have been on a structure associated with authority. Karkov also differs from my own perspective in her view of how the sheelas look: she sees them as only partially human with "monstrous heads and decaying bodies [which] set[s] many of them apart as distinctly 'other'" [2001: 319]. As I have pointed out, they are completely human, not partially human, but an exaggerated version of human-ness. They are not hybridised, as many other Romanesque marginal images are, leading to their being more convincingly argued to represent 'other'. My argument for sheelas is that they represent something beyond 'otherness'.

So far, I have looked at the specific literature on sheela-na-gigs. However, this has to be set within the wider art-historical context which has influentially informed studies of medieval imagery including sculpture. Much of what has been said within the sheela-na-gig literature has wittingly or unwittingly been shaped by the art-historical canon, and so an understanding of this, at least in some measure, is vital for setting sheelas in context.

The Art Historical Context

Understandings of Romanesque sculpture.

Art and sculpture known as Romanesque in Britain refers to a particular style dating from the arrival of the Normans to the early Gothic style of the thirteenth century, that is, broadly-speaking, AD 1066 – 1210, although some authors [for example, Timmers 1965: 191] see the beginnings of Romanesque architecture in England starting as early as 1042-1065, during the reign of Edward the Confessor. The term ‘Romanesque’ was not devised until 1818, when the French antiquarian de Gerville referred, disparagingly, to the ‘heavy and clumsy architecture’ of the “*opus romanum dénaturé*” [Timmers 1965: 8; Bober, foreword in Mâle 1978: viii]. This attitude was prevalent towards Romanesque architecture and sculpture during the nineteenth century, and earlier, with it being viewed as the debased Roman style. The more positive modern attitude is demonstrated by Stalley in that these buildings are seen as “imbued with an expressive power that had not been seen since the days of the Roman Empire” [Stalley 1999: 191]. Romanesque architecture and sculpture were also viewed not as pertaining to a separate period, but rather, as Cocke [1973] states, as contained within the post-classical period blanketed as a whole, with ‘Gothic’ being the portmanteau term for all medieval art.

A crucial aspect of Romanesque aesthetics is the way in which the individual parts of the building were subordinated to the whole, a reflection of medieval notions of beauty: “ ‘For beauty is a concordance and fittingness of a thing to itself and of all the individual parts to themselves and to each other and to the whole, and that of the whole to all things’ ” [Robert Grosseteste¹⁵, thirteenth century, quoted by Eco 1986: 48].

¹⁵ The source for this quote is Henri Pouillon, ‘La beauté, propriété transcendente chez les scholastiques’, *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, XXI, 1946: 263-329.

As well as roll mouldings, wall arcades, arcaded galleries and passageways, and windows and portals with recessed orders, one of the features of Romanesque architecture is the production of monumental sculpture which, by the middle of the twelfth century, masons embellished with rich carving. Chevrons, beads, billets, nail heads, cusps, fret patterns, beakheads, foliage, human figural, animal, and hybrid creatures, were all part of the repertoire of sculptural motifs.

The nineteenth century was the first to produce sustained scholarship on the art of the medieval period, after its post-Renaissance denigration. But it was Gothic art, particularly of the thirteenth century, rather than Romanesque, that was seen as the quintessence of medieval art. Emile Mâle (1862-1954) was an art historian who, in his nineteenth century writings, completely espoused the attitude that the thirteenth century produced art that “expressed all things ... [and was] the finished system” [Mâle 1898: iv-v, cited by Bober in Mâle 1978: vi].

Mâle was professor of art history at the Sorbonne until 1924 – succeeded by Henri Focillon, another great French art historian with a strong interest in the medieval period. Mâle’s 1898 volume on religious art of the thirteenth century was to be complemented by two more volumes: art of the end of the Middle Ages (published in 1908), and art of the twelfth century (published in 1922). It is a reflection of the changing interest in Romanesque art that this was the last of his three volumes. In the nineteenth century, the pre-Gothic (i.e. pre-thirteenth century) Middle Ages were seen as barbarous, in terms of sculpture, due to its non-classical form. It is only in the twentieth century that acknowledgement of the twelfth century as a major period of medieval art became accepted.

Mâle came to alter his view about Romanesque art; by 1922 his changed attitude stands in sharp contrast to that of his earlier work of 1898. Whereas he had seen the Gothic thirteenth century as producing medieval art at its best, he later realised that twelfth century iconography is full of complexities and contradictions, and stated that the sculpture of the thirteenth century is inconceivable without it. Mâle is considered to be the originator of the idea that the sculpture of doorways constitutes an iconographic programme. This understanding may have influenced how other contemporary sculpture has been

perceived, that the iconographic or historiated programme is the standard against which all other sculpture is measured. Certainly Lane [1997] argues this, stating that “sculpture which differs from this standard ... is considered to have short-comings or not to have developed to the same level of maturity” [Lane 1997: 4]. Lane does not take this argument further though, and extend it to include how such a standard also incurs a binary system of definition. The issue of iconographic consistency that she raises as being a twentieth century construct is not so important as the notion of the sculpture being divided into categories at all: this surely is a modern imposition? As I argue elsewhere in this thesis, the medieval understanding of the sculpture would have been much less fragmented than our own.

Returning to Mâle, a major factor influencing new appreciations of Romanesque art during the early twentieth century was the realisation that illuminated manuscripts were an important complement to sculpture, and that the subjects of monumental sculpture were to be found in manuscripts. A theory put forward by Terret (who wrote the first comprehensive review and critique of nineteenth century pejorative views of Romanesque sculpture¹⁶), and Enlart (Director of the Musée de Sculpture Comparée in 1911) in the second decade of the twentieth century, was that sculptural motifs were derived from manuscript imagery. Mâle, however, did not accept this, viewing the range of Romanesque subjects as wider than that contained within the manuscripts. As well as manuscripts, he proposed influences from Hellenistic, Syrian, and Byzantine iconography. He also saw twelfth century iconography being enriched by aspects of cultural history, such as the influence of liturgy, liturgical drama, the cults of local and national saints, pilgrimages, and the monastic life.

Mâle, however, still continued understandings of the Romanesque as enshrined in the classical appreciation of art history, where different styles and forms were seen in developmental evolutionary terms, with a focus on the analysis of style and iconography, the canon, and connoisseurship. This attitude is still prevalent today within architectural history, despite the new art history that emerged during the 1970s, criticising the traditional art historical emphases, shifting “the

¹⁶ Victor Terret, *La sculpture bourguignonne au XIIe et XIIIe siècles, ses origines et ses sources d'inspiration: Cluny*. Paris, 1914.

centre of gravity away from objects and towards social context and ideology, that is to the structures of social power, and from there to politics, feminism, psychoanalysis, and theory” [Ferne 1995: 19].

It is in these new art history terms that I approach my subject of sheela-na-gigs.

The move towards an appreciation of the social history of art was developed during the 1940s and 1950s following the pioneering work of the American anthropological art historian Meyer Schapiro. Schapiro also plays an important role in understandings of the Romanesque. In his ‘On the aesthetic attitude in Romanesque art’ [1947], he highlights the notion of context as key to understanding imagery, whilst also endorsing that admiration for medieval art does not require “that we accept feudalism as an ideal human order or the legends and dogmas represented in the church sculptures as true beliefs” [Schapiro (1947) 1977: 1]. Schapiro also clearly indicates that he does not accept the didactic explanation, which had hitherto been propounded, for much of the type of church sculpture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that he calls “this new art, on the margins of the religious work” [*ibid.*: 1-2], for he says: “there is an enormous quantity of elements which, from a religious-didactic and structural viewpoint, are entirely useless” [*ibid.*: 3].

Schapiro is interested a) in getting away from the notion of medieval art requiring deeply religious influences, and b) in seeing “the essentially aesthetic and secular moment in these Romanesque carvings and the individuation of members” [*ibid.*: 6]. He sees the Romanesque producing human individuality as expressed in the art - less marked in Gothic, and rare in earlier Christian, architecture. He sees a strong culture of aestheticism flowing through the twelfth century; in terms of sculpture, this aestheticism represents something other than religious or ornamental objectives.

In contrast to Schapiro is George Zarnecki who is often seen as the scholar who established the study of Romanesque sculpture in England. He began this work with his doctoral dissertation of 1950 ‘Regional schools of English sculpture in the twelfth century’, and continued with his two-volume work of 1951 and 1953 ‘English Romanesque sculpture 1066-1140’, and ‘1140-1210’.

In a recent PhD [Lane 1997] on architectural sculpture in Romanesque England, Kathleen Lane cites Zarnecki as the protagonist for the “identification and elucidation of sources, styles, characteristics, and iconography of English Romanesque sculpture” [Lane 1997: 2]. However, in this Zarnecki is also reflecting a nineteenth century approach, and although Lane also credits Zarnecki with setting English Romanesque sculpture within its wider European sculptural context, this is carried out with a strongly evolutionary and diffusionistic interpretation, with little or no social context. He focuses very much on the sculpture itself. He talks of the development of the sculpture as that of “ever-increasing complexity of form and decoration” [Zarnecki 1953: 44] and that “in the earlier Romanesque, the evolution of sculpture was rather slow, hesitant and contacts with artistic centres abroad were rare” [*ibid.*: 51]. Referring to beak-heads, he says they were particularly popular in Oxfordshire and Yorkshire: “those in Oxfordshire seem to have been influenced by Reading, and it was also via the cell of Reading Abbey at Leominster that this decoration was probably introduced into Herefordshire” [*ibid.*: 7]. European influence is clearly cited by Zarnecki, despite his analysis of the regional schools of sculpture. Whilst advocating the regional diversity of English Romanesque sculpture, he also sees a strong relationship between western France, especially, and the Yorkshire School for example. Radiating voussoirs were a particular feature of the Romanesque architecture of western France and Zarnecki says are to be found in almost every doorway of the Yorkshire School. His regional analysis does not, it seems, include the possibility of indigenous design.

He also exhibits a limited view of the sculptural motifs. For example, in discussing beak-heads again, he refers to them as “somewhat barbaric” and that “the almost savage character of some of the beak-heads cannot be denied” [*ibid.*], as though such representations are inappropriate to the building they are on, without questioning why, or, indeed, if they are “savage”.

There have not been a great number of studies that have looked specifically at Romanesque sculpture, and there appears to be a hiatus after Zarnecki, particularly when looking at the sculpture of the period as a whole. Much of the scholarship focuses on sites linked, perhaps, by workshop, patron or monastic affiliation, or by geographical location, with traditional analysis of subject matter,

style, and iconography [Galbraith 1962; Gethyn-Jones 1979; Alford 1984; Johnson 1989; Kahn 1991].

Michael Camille, whom I have mentioned earlier, includes sculpture within his interest in ‘marginal’ imagery (in this he includes manuscript imagery as well as sculptural). Nurith Kenaan-Kedar [1995] criticises Camille’s work [1992], for, she says, he ascribes the same characteristics to both illuminated manuscripts and marginal sculpture and in so doing disregards essential differences between them in terms of audience and location.

Kedar [1995] looks specifically at twelfth to sixteenth century French ‘marginal’ sculpture, which consists mainly of corbel and gargoyle series. Kedar says that “French Romanesque and Gothic marginal sculpture has been almost totally neglected, never interpreted, and usually written off as merely ‘decorative’ or ‘grotesque’” [Kenaan-Kedar 1995: 1]. The same can be said to be true for British Romanesque sculpture. Kedar believes these attitudes arose as a result of the establishment of medieval art as an autonomous aspect of art history, and focused on ‘masterpieces’, work produced in leading artistic centres that reflected an articulate, learned culture. In this, she says, is reflected the interests of the early twentieth century art historians who came from a similarly elitist background. As a result, she says, “the boldly expressive, unstylized imagery of marginal sculpture, which represented protest and transgressed the codes of official culture, whether medieval or modern, was largely ignored” [*ibid.*].

One can begin to get a sense of Kedar’s own focus, of identifying, perhaps, with the ‘marginalised’ aspects of medieval sculpture, with that which is not considered mainstream, and which resists hegemony.

Kedar divides sculptural imagery into ‘marginal’ and ‘official’, and puts forward that the ‘marginal’ sculptures are functional or quasi-functional, acting as supports for higher architectural orders or as water spouts (gargoyles). She says: “this functionality seems to have relegated them to a lower category of art, thought inferior to the didactic art of the official sculptures appearing on façades, portals and other places of prominence” [*ibid.*: 4].

This theory may hold true specifically for corbels and gargoyles, which Kedar is primarily looking at, but the question of the relationship between the sculpture and the architectural functionality is more complicated than this. It can be argued that most, if not all, sculpture is an embellishment of an architecturally functional feature (for example, capitals, corbels, portals, and arches do not need to be sculpted to be functional) and therefore, the division of the sculpture into a 'lower' or 'higher' category of art, based upon whether it is placed on something that is architecturally functional, is redundant.

Whilst not explaining who thought of these images as a 'lower category of art', Kedar continues with the binary theme of marginal and official sculptural schemes demonstrating two completely different concepts in style and meaning. Thus, official Christological schemes depict a compositional model that is hierarchical and symmetrically oppositional using contrasting parallels such as high/low, good/evil, light/dark. Their contexts give the images a specific meaning that can be 'read' by the observer. Kedar says these compositions reflect contemporary models of society described by various ecclesiastical writers. "The formal tendency of official art is stylization, idealization, symmetry and framework" [*ibid.*: 4].

Kedar applies Corti's [1979] theory of the anti-model (which I discuss more fully in my medieval context section) to marginal imagery, saying that these compositions are neither symmetrical nor hierarchical, and that the oppositional schemes of official art are absent. Indeed, the marginal imagery is seen by Kedar as having a precise objective:

"the artists present a category of sculpted imagery, bestowed with metaphorical possibilities, in a style intentionally meant to question and to test the official artistic criteria" [Kenaar-Kedar 1995: 5].

The problem with Kedar's theory is that it depends entirely upon binary oppositions; I cannot accept that the artists deliberately set out to create imagery to 'question and test' the official compositional criteria. For whom were they creating it, when, as Kedar herself states, so much of the imagery is not visible from the ground? For their own satisfaction? If this is the case, then it does not tally with Kedar's emphasis on the sculpture representing a 'language',

and, therefore, a means of communicating with others. She puts forward that marginal sculpture is an autonomous artistic language with its own vocabulary and syntax which can be ‘read’ via the signs and symbols contained within it, and is thus approaching her subject with classic Saussurean linguistic analysis.¹⁷

Marginal images for Kedar function at at least two levels, each with its own set of codes and each recognized mainly by a specific audience. Thus, her interpretation is that when read literally as a ‘mere image’ by the ‘simplices’ or the artists themselves, marginal sculpture expresses popular statements, tastes and social positions. However, when read metaphorically, symbolically, or allegorically, marginal sculpture could have served the patrons as didactic imagery for Christian morals. This, however, seems at odds with Kedar’s earlier statement that it was only the official art that contained didactic imagery.

Stalley [1999], like Kedar, supports the notion of art as language in application to the Romanesque.

“Rather than insisting on Romanesque as a unified style, it is more useful to think of it in terms of a language, utilized by local masons according to their own traditions and aesthetic choices” [Stalley 1999: 211].

O’Keeffe, who has recently written a thorough study of the Romanesque in Ireland, does not endorse viewing architecture as a language, as a system of ‘signs’, seeing this resulting in a closing down of a range of meanings, perhaps privileging a dominant meaning which was controlled by the elites [O’Keeffe 2003: 291]. However, he does not offer any alternatives for how one might view it, other than proffering that as well as being part of the “text of medieval life ... these buildings ... were [also] part of its texture” [*ibid.*].

This notion of art as language or text, specifically as applied to medieval sculpture, is a theoretical aspect which space does not allow me to explore further within this thesis. It is an area I would like to pursue for a subsequent publication, however.

¹⁷ See also Panofsky [1939] for the traditional iconographic method, which incorporates semiotics.

Medieval context

Clearly, in a work of this size, I am unable to discuss all the components that might be construed as relevant to a medieval context for sheela-na-gigs. Whatever their 'origins', sheelas are definitely seen as significant enough - to have meant something - to have been deliberately chosen as an image (often *the* image) to place on a church or tower house from the twelfth century onwards. Thus, it is essential that at least some aspects of a medieval context are presented.

The medieval contexts I have chosen to focus on are, in my opinion, of direct relevance for an understanding of sheela-na-gigs:

- 1) perceptions of the body, particularly the female body;
- 2) the notion of wildness; and
- 3) perceptions of witchcraft.

All three of these provide insights into medieval, rather than modern, modes of thought, thus demonstrating how modern misunderstandings might occur when dealing with imagery such as sheelas.

However, before looking at these aspects I would like to present an understanding of the broader medieval context from a theoretical perspective. One such perspective, which has influenced the work of prominent medieval scholars including Michael Camille [1992: 26-31] and others (Benton [2004], for example), is that put forward by Maria Corti [1979].

Corti discusses medieval society in terms of models and anti-models. Her paper creates a framework from within which medieval cultural aspects can be viewed, and is thus useful for applying to my chosen areas. Corti's approach is semiotic and highly structuralist. Although I do not support a semiotic theoretical stance, my reason for presenting Corti's model within this thesis is because much of the academic corpus on medieval sculpture is entrenched in a traditional

architectural and art-historical approach which knowingly or unknowingly supports such a semiotic vision. Kenaan-Kedar [see p. 99, this thesis], for example, applies Corti's model to her own, recent work.¹⁸

According to Corti, in the eleventh century a ternary social model became prevalent in Europe, consisting of ecclesiastics, warriors (or nobility), and peasants, with the ecclesiastics at the top in a triangular hierarchy. Before this there were either hybrid models derived from earlier social categories of late antiquity, or dualistic models (clerics/laymen, freemen/slaves). The ternary model became the dominant model for two hundred years, "simplifying and at the same time erecting barriers between classes" [Corti 1979: 340]. The ternary model also projected the idea of the Holy Trinity, thus enabling society to participate in the divine model. In this way the philosophy of the Middle Ages was not seen as a cultural creation but rather an iconic principle of construction of the world whose origin is God. The ternary model is the one that Corti says was used by medieval culture for self-description.

However, there are problems with this model, says Corti. Women, for example, are not accommodated within the iconic triangle. More importantly for my understanding of medieval imagery, what does not fit into the model cannot be accommodated within the sign/signifier relationship, which Corti says is the only level in religious and cultural terms that has any meaning. These non-categorisable elements "live at an existential level as error, discord, negative and entropic, that is, pluralizing and centrifugal" [Corti 1979: 340]. Although the concept of 'signs' is intrinsic to a semiotic understanding and therefore does not allow for other communicabilities that are less structural, we can see how grotesque marginal imagery may well fit into this 'uncategorisable' category.

To control the possibility of these 'wildcard' elements necessitated the existence of tightly bound acceptable categories, and yet in so doing also created the likelihood of uncategorisables existing. In addition, as the ternary model is divine in nature, society has to remain fixed as movement between classes would be

¹⁸ See O'Keeffe [2003: 25-32] for a recent discussion of the traditional architectural view for the Romanesque and problems it has produced and still produces in scholars' perceptions of it

betraying the plan as laid down by God. The Church (as the bourgeois ecclesiastics at the top of the power hierarchy) endorsed social class non-movement, discouraging the seeking of knowledge for its own sake. Such structuring, says Corti, leads to a series of oppositions within society such as high/low, closed/open, immobile/mobile, ordered/disordered. We can see how this might be applied to understandings of medieval society such as Bakhtin's [1984] carnival theory where such structuring is inverted even if only temporarily.

The idea of society represented as a triangle is further replicated within medieval thought and culture by the notion of a greater triangle as macrocosm including increasingly smaller triangles, one within the other, as microcosm. This further structuring creates the possibility of inclusion or exclusion.

Thus,

“everything that is new, extraneous to the model, everything that contradicts cultural stereotypes, thereby finding itself located beyond the confines of collective memory, finds it difficult to gain a foothold. Any ideology or programme which is in any measure deviant, triggers off a conflicting semiotic reaction within the society between the ‘different’, which requires new structuring models, and what has already been codified and is dominant (with its differently oriented structures). The conflict is all the more marked when the initial system is closed, ordered, hierarchic, as [this earlier] medieval system was.”

[Corti 1979: 345]

During the eleventh century, and part of the twelfth, women do not fit into the three-order model: they have no official place on a cultural or sign level, defined only by their relationship with men as wives or servants. For Corti this is because women do not have a ‘sign-function’. However, during the course of the twelfth century and further developed in the thirteenth century, a new social model emerges producing a hierarchical structure involving women.

Parts of the ternary model are kept, but in order to accommodate the repercussions of socio-economic changes in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, a deliberate merging is orchestrated (especially on the part of the Dominican

Order) to produce a new all-embracing hierarchic structure. However, Corti criticises the new model in that, although it is broader, it still ends up being unable to accommodate things which do not fall within the bounds of the model. It would appear to be exactly the same model as the ternary one in fact, but just not limited to the three orders of society, and so women have a place in it. Medieval culture does, however, also offer examples which are extraneous to the model – elements which are not official, that are open towards the different, the discordant, the opposite with respect to official codification. But, says Corti [1979: 350], descriptions of this world of dissent are few and far between, but would include the work of ‘clerici vagantes’ (wandering clergy), ‘histriones’ (actors), ‘joculatores’ (jesters), and goliards (wandering scholars/poets). Official texts pass over it in silence, quite possibly deliberately, constituting an exclusion mechanism.

Corti adds that much transgressing material of the twelfth century has been lost because it never *was* written down, but entrusted to oral transmission, since the fact of writing it could have involved sender and receiver both in mortal peril. However, I would add that texts alone are not the only way to witness this transgressing material. That is why it is necessary to study sculpture and other imagery. Creators of such imagery may have even been well aware of the exclusion of such material by ‘official’ means, and thus used their own media to represent things that were otherwise being deliberately excluded.

Corti says that this transgressing culture, however, did develop and accumulate information, and slowly became institutionalised alongside official culture [Corti 1979: 351]. The most striking aspect which all manifestations of this ‘difference’ have in common is the stress they lay on the bodily nature of things, i.e. on just that element which the clerical official culture had rejected: the spirit / flesh dichotomy. Emphasis is shifted to the material (the body, sex, excrement) which is thus transformed into a symbol of fecundity. This reversal of positive and negative signs involves all oppositions pertinent to the model, says Corti; the high / low opposition, homologous to that of spirit / flesh, is turned upside down not merely on the individual plane but at the collective level as well, since it is the people who are the chief carriers of these material, bodily values. For the people, the area of ludic manifestation is the public square, the arena, the fair,

the market place – spatial structures that are open, and therefore not safe from spiritual decadence.

From Corti's chosen semiotic viewpoint, twelfth century culture was unable to absorb the 'different' into its pyramidal model, leaving it an 'open' phenomenon. As a result, it is interesting to look at the relationships that are set up between the model and what is 'different' when the latter begins to be ritualised and institutionalised. For this, Corti stresses the mediation of an intellectual class: clerics, university students, *jongleurs* (minstrels), whose cultural standing is well within the ranks of official culture, and who "lead, mediate, and articulate the explosion of what is 'below', acting as a sort of intermediate cultural class" [*ibid.*: 353]. Such intellectuals produced the texts of the sacred parodies, burlesque Passions and erotic-sacred texts: transgression in the form of sacred parody. Corti emphasises that it is written tradition that has come down to us – so the passage from oral to written she sees as being channelled via a layer of learned persons within the official culture who absorb the motifs of lower level culture, making them their own. In this way, she says, transgressions with respect to the general cultural model are produced within the culture which has generated the model itself.

Again this does not allow for sculptural non-text-based imagery although Corti does say "the dichotomy is reproduced in accurate figurative terms, model and antimodel rubbing shoulders within the sacred enclosure of the cathedral" [*ibid.*: 355]. Corti fails, I think, to explain how this can be so, when the cathedral, or church, is a closed and exclusive space; much marginal ('anti-model') imagery is found on the exterior of sacred buildings, but not all; a proportion is also found on the interior. In addition, sheelas are located on buildings other than religious ones. Medieval sculpture defines sacred space in churches [Camille 1993: 47]; but how does such sculpture define *secular* space? In terms of sheelas, how do they define secular space? Can they still be seen in terms of defining sacred space despite being on non-religious buildings? I believe they can because the sacred itself is not defined by buildings. Buildings can be specific to religiosity, such as churches, but the vastness of the sacred as a concept means it cannot be contained within or by a mere building.

Thus, the binary oppositions of Corti's theory do not allow for anything other than the 'other' as opposition, defined by what is the norm. The idea of the anti-model necessarily results in it ending up to some extent as an upside-down reproduction of the model dissented from. For the type of imagery that I am looking at, in particular sheela-na-gigs, I do not see a simple inversion of the dominant model being represented in the imagery. The production of sheelas is far more subtle, and complicated, than this.

From this broader and abstract theoretical perspective, I now turn to look at more tangible aspects of the medieval period.

The medieval body

'Woman' as a differentiated body is a relatively recent concept. Prior to the late eighteenth century men and women, it can be argued, were seen as two versions of the same (male) sex. Galen (c. 130-200 AD) adhered to the view that women's genitals were the same as men's but on the inside of the body. The vagina was seen as an interior penis, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testes. Galen uses the same word for ovaries as for testes: *orcheis*. By the beginning of the 1800s, fundamental differences were being seen between men and women based on 'scientific', biological distinctions, which became expressed in a new rhetoric. For example, in 1803, Jacques-Louis Moreau, arguing against Galen and Aristotle (384-322 BC), that the sexes are different in every way: in body, soul, physically and morally. Thus, according to Laqueur, "the old model, in which men and women were arrayed according to their degree of metaphysical perfection, their vital heat, along an axis whose telos was male, gave way by the late eighteenth century to a new model of radical dimorphism and biological divergence" [Laqueur 1990: 6].

In the west, the dominant view has been, post-eighteenth century, that there are two opposite sexes, and that the social gender roles of men and women are based on these biological 'facts'. This post-Enlightenment attitude thus colours our, modern, understanding of ancient, medieval and Renaissance texts about the body. Even a post-modern understanding of the body does not allow for the

medieval construct of it. As Laqueur says: “bodies in these texts did strange, remarkable, and to modern readers, impossible things” [Laqueur 1990: 7]. This is clearly of relevance for an understanding of the medieval marginal imagery of bizarre creatures and of sheela-na-gigs. A medieval image that ostensibly represents a massive vulva does not necessarily mean it is a ‘massive vulva’. These things cannot be taken at face value. What you see is definitely not necessarily what you get, or what was meant.

Laqueur proposes that in the pre-Enlightenment texts, sex and the sexed body must be understood as the ‘epiphenomenon’, while gender (seen as a cultural construct in post-modern terms) was the primary identifier of a person, not their ‘sex’. This is because in the one-sex model ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ were intricately bound together in a way which did not allow a biological division. In a strange way, the medieval notion of the body is actually more post-modern than the post-modern version, we are so coloured by the post-Enlightenment distinctions. In the one-sex model, to be a man or a woman was about social rank, and place in society, not about whether you possessed one or other of the types of sexual apparatus.

With this in mind, it is possible to begin to see how hybridisation (e.g. hermaphroditism) is not a strange idea at all for the medieval mindset. Sexual features do not define the concept of ‘woman’, so, sheelas interpreted as ‘female’ representations may not actually be a relevant way of looking at them, medievally-speaking. The body can also be seen as representing something greater than itself, an extracorporeal reality, for in the one-sex model “at least two genders correspond to but one sex, the boundaries between male and female are of degree, not of kind, and the reproductive organs are but one sign among many of the body’s place in a cosmic and cultural order that transcends biology” [Laqueur 1990: 25].

However, a strong criticism of Laqueur’s ideas of the one-sex model, which I identify, is that in actual fact what we have represented is an *absence* of the female. Cadden [1993] similarly has problems with Laqueur’s one-sex model, although she concedes that there is a lot of evidence to support his model. But, however Laqueur may try to dress it up, the underlying Aristotelian

emphasis remains, that woman is not recognised as woman but as a lesser form of man. For example, a woman's 'sperma' were deemed unable to ensoul matter, whereas a man's could. In terms of imagery, though, it does aid us in an understanding of how mutations are possible where "a physiology of fungible fluids and corporeal flux represents in a different register the absence of specifically genital sex" [Laqueur 1990: 35].

Notions of health in the medieval period were seen in terms of the four humours, of excess or insufficient heat, and the importance of body fluids, and are all Aristotelian ideas. Thus, within the medieval construct of the body, intra-body causal connections were made such as singers not being able to sing when menstruating. This was to do with the association between the throat or the neck through which air flows and the neck of the womb through which blood flows – activity in one detracts from activity in the other. These connections between the throat and the cervix/vagina or the mouth and pudenda, Laqueur says are very common throughout antiquity and up to the nineteenth century.

The significance of the womb

The equation of 'womb' (*matrix*) with woman does appear to have been a significant one, with a strong association of *mater* with *matrix* [Cadden 1993: 177]. The imagery of the womb supports the underlying attitude towards women, that they were considered a 'passive vessel', and Cadden provides manuscript imagery that shows the womb as a sort of upside-down jar, completely dissociated from any 'body' [Cadden 1993: 179]. However, conversely, the womb was also seen in active terms, as an equivalent of the penis. Thus, there is a paradox in the medieval understanding of the womb as a biological entity, but not, perhaps of it as a symbol.

Barb [1953] discusses the symbol of the womb as found engraved on abraxas or 'gnostic gems', which were much collected and studied in the seventeenth century. These are small haematite stones engraved with various images and symbols, dating to the classical period, and are Graeco-Egyptian. Barb interprets the womb symbolism in terms of the 'cosmic' womb, the mother goddess, for one of the most ancient deities is the Sumerian *Nintu*, the 'Lady of Birth' who is symbolised by a representation of a womb. It is found on Sumerian boundary

stones, on altars and thrones. Much of this ancient imagery percolated through to the medieval period, finding its way via Manicheism, Arabic alchemy, and Jewish kabbala [see Barb 1953: 203].

Heat and hair

Heat is a particularly important medieval aspect for defining differences between people; I deliberately avoid the use of the term ‘sex’ differences because it is the notion of heat which is the defining thing, not the presence or absence of certain body parts. For example, it was considered their greater heat that allowed men to make their ‘nutritive superfluities’ into hair and beards. Hair also had very significant medieval meaning in defining masculinity, which was not a simple male/female division. “Hair was directly proportional to libido in men”, says Cadden [1993: 181], “and the quantity and location of hair was ... one of the features which distinguished men of different temperaments from each other” [*ibid.*]. The beard also corresponded to libido. For females, the display of long hair (of the head) was associated in the medieval period with concupiscence [Camille 1994: 83].

As absence of hair is associated with persons who are lacking in heat and libido – women and castrati, for example – we could postulate that the baldness of sheelas actually signifies they are lacking in libido. This would be supportive of my suggestion that sheelas are definitely not sexual representations. The concept of hairiness and notions of wildness are also linked ideas. I discuss these further in the next section of this chapter.

Fragmentation and medieval corporeal ‘otherness’

Rubin [1994], who looks at the construction of gender in medieval texts to attempt to reveal the body’s ‘otherness’ in medieval consciousness, also endorses the view that medieval notions of sexuality were “very fluid” [Rubin 1994: 101]. She sees the regulating order as one not based on biology, in keeping with ideas discussed above, but rather that it was based on a dichotomy of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’. She also endorses the view that the medieval attitude towards the body was one of seeing it in parts, a fragmented vision. This is a reflection of an academic trend during the 1990s in the study of the Middle Ages and early modern period, which has taken the idea of fragmentation and

applied it to understandings of the body (see, for example, Bynum 1991; Hillman & Mazzio 1997). As Hillman & Mazzio say: “the elevation of the fragment to a position of central significance is, indeed, very much a topical matter in contemporary culture; the rejection of all forms of totality, including the corporeal, is one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism” [1997: xii]. This view of fragmentation is not one I particularly espouse because it is essentially a post-modern approach and not necessarily a reflection of how the body was actually viewed during the medieval period. This is particularly true in terms of medieval imagery I think, where hybridisation might result in an odd collection of body parts seen in one representation, but the significance is not found in the individual parts; rather it is in the image as a whole that the incomprehensibility and, therefore, the visual impact, takes place.

Rubin’s concept of medieval ‘otherness’ appears to consist of hermaphrodites, and the Plinian monsters (as discussed by Friedman [1981], and by myself in my section on monsters, Chapter Four of this thesis), which includes androgynes and hermaphrodites as ‘monsters’, and is, therefore, not a very revelatory or original concept. Her point would seem to be that a one gender role had to be adhered to, that there was a “need to define a single sexual persona and impose on it a heterosexual orientation” [Rubin 1994: 104]. This is to do with clarity of social identity, which was paramount for medieval culture. Medieval religious and secular imagery also has to endorse such identity in its ‘official’ capacity, but the marginal art can truly portray ‘otherness’ as acceptable (if not identifiable) imagery, because it needs to be ‘other’ to mean something. I return to this again in depth in my fourth chapter.

Medieval representations of the body

Camille [1994] resists interpretations of body imagery which attempt to ‘read’ these images like a book; rather, he is interested in demonstrating that there were “competing notions of the body ... in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that were articulated ... through images” [Camille 1994: 62]. He also does not hold with the modern attitude of a division between the somatic and the social, that individual bodily experience is somehow separate from the cultural systems they are part of. Camille reiterates that this division “does not hold for the medieval period when the human body was the site of intense visual scrutiny and

surveillance by the Church, was subject to the bonds of feudal lordship and was at the same time caught in a cosmic network that controlled both its internal and external movements” [Camille 1994: 62].

Like myself, Camille would appear to reject the theoretical ideas that ‘art is text’ and that fragmentation is applicable to interpretations of medieval art and culture.

One of the reasons that fragmentation is not an applicable theoretical approach is because the human body was seen as a microcosm of the cosmos itself, the *corpus animatum* (living body) of the heavens, and also located within it. Thus the medieval view was that there was an inextricable link between heavenly and earthly bodies: “the stars were tangible bodies which ... had ‘direct’ lines to specific parts of one’s anatomy and ruled ... the waves of humoral fluids within one’s body” [Camille 1994: 67]. Although separate body parts are identified they are not seen as separate entities, but are always seen as connected to, and influenced by, something else.

There was a sense of vertical hierarchy in operation, where the universe was seen as the superior Body which influenced the inferior (the human body). This vertical hierarchy applied to understandings of the human body itself too, where the head was seen as superior to the lower parts of the body. This is particularly of interest in relation to sheelas where the head clearly is an important site due to its usual largeness of representation, but out of keeping with the vertical hierarchy model is the also (usually) excessively large vulva. The genitals were seen as a site of shame, a symbol of man’s Fall. So, clearly sheelas break the rules for this model. This makes more sense if sheelas are seen as outside the ‘norm’ for viewing the body as either a model for heavenly order or as a model for the structure of earthly society. It also makes more sense when seen within Corti’s model/anti-model theory, presented at the beginning of this chapter.

Camille says medieval artists had a problem when it came to representing the soul. Seen as a type of breath, and therefore invisible, the soul animated and defined the body, but could only be visualised in its movements into and out of the body. It was often pictured in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a



homunculus, a miniature version of the human form, shown leaving the body at death (like representations of the *keres* from Greek art, which I discuss in Chapter Four) from the mouth of the deceased. Camille refers to “the power of the mouth in medieval culture as a dangerous liminal zone, a hole in the crucial barrier between inside and outside” [Camille 1994: 70].

The concept of the body politic was an important one for medieval culture, where a depiction of a two-headed human could be a metaphor for the unacceptable situation of two competing heads of power, representing, for example, papal and imperial disputes, resulting in a ‘monster’. However, later in the Middle Ages polycephalic representations were acceptable in terms of spiritual representations, for example, the three heads of the Holy Trinity. My own view is that it very much depends on the locational context of these images as to the interpretation of metaphoric ‘monster’ or something more sacred. This I discuss in depth in my fourth chapter.

Women’s bodies

Christ’s Wound can be seen as a vagina-like object of desire, desire in the medieval spiritual sense of empathising with Christ’s suffering. Although this can be criticised as essentially a masculine heterosexual view, there is also the notion of the feminisation of the image of Christ through the idea of the Wound as vagina.¹⁹ Is it possible that other contemporary representations of the vagina / vulva might similarly be interpreted, spiritually and symbolically, as the Wound of Christ? If so, we have here another clue to a possible meaning applicable to sheelas, if we see them in spiritual terms. Christ’s Wound was in his side, near the belly; and the uterus, as *venter*, was the belly common to both sexes, whereas uterus as womb was *uterus* or *uterum* [Laqueur 1990: 27]. *Valva* (i.e. vulva / vagina)²⁰ meant ‘gateway to the belly’, so we have here a double reference to medieval connections between ‘belly’ (which can be of either sex), the wound of Christ and the vagina / vulva. Sheelas in their emphasis on the vulva may partly be representing their meaning as Christ-like, and, therefore, like Christ, as a ‘gateway’ to God. This, again, would support my idea of the sacred aspect of sheelas which is fully developed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

¹⁹ See Sandler 1984, and Bynum 1982, for more on these ideas.

²⁰ See J.N. Adams 1982, *The Latin sexual vocabulary*.

However, we have a paradox in the misogynistic basis of medieval culture which saw women as inferior, biologically, socially, and spiritually. How can this be reconciled with sheelas as representations of women if I am interpreting them as spiritual symbols? I deal with the answer to this question more fully in Chapter Four, but suffice to say here that I do not think sheelas are representations of 'women' as such; rather they are extreme images of something almost female, but ambiguous in their representation. We can almost recognise them as female but not fully. And yet they are fully human, not hybridised.

Women's souls: the fiction of the 'sexless soul'

Jacqueline Murray [1998] locates medieval female spirituality as a masculine construct, pointing to the lack of equality despite the Christian doctrine that the souls of all believers are equal. This tenet implies a sexless soul, however, "by the twelfth century, scholastic theology considered that a sexless soul could in fact develop better in a male, as opposed to a female, body" [Murray 1998: 80]. The Neoplatonic view was instrumental in supporting the notion that women's physical bodies made them weaker than men, and because of childbirth they were tied more closely to the physical realm. Due to the concept of a vertical hierarchy, as discussed earlier, the spiritual world was seen in terms of being superior to the physical world, and men (who were seen as superior to women) were similarly seen as more spiritually-inclined and able than women. Female bodies and souls became marginalised; whilst all souls were ostensibly sexless, in effect a gendered soul existed, which, whilst not specifically sexed 'female', "carried with it the implications of being gendered female because it was housed in a female body" [Murray 1998: 80].

Murray refers particularly to medieval confessors' manuals that taught priests how to hear confession. These manuals provide an insight into the moral milieu of the medieval period and show the values and behaviours the Church was trying to promote as acceptable. The manuals also reveal what the priest was expected to teach to the laity, how he was supposed to direct their social and spiritual lives so that they would be in keeping with the Church's official doctrine. They are, thus, extremely useful documents for revealing "the spiritual norms of sex and gender that the Church sought to impose and the secular norms of sex

and gender that it expected to encounter” [Murray 1998: 82]. The manuals were produced in the early thirteenth century and, by this time, the notion of the sexless soul was not visible; the manuals, in fact, constructed woman as sexual by definition, says Murray [*ibid.*].

This is of interest to me in understanding how sheelas may have been viewed as medieval material objects, produced and existing within the medieval social and spiritual contexts, and misunderstood because of dominant attitudes towards the female body (bearing in mind sheelas are *exaggerations* of the female body).

In the confessors’ manuals, the ancient tripartite division of women (as virgin, matron, or widow) has almost disappeared; they are mentioned primarily as matrons and defined by their reproductive and sexual function. The medieval Christian attitude to women, as revealed in these manuals, clearly associated them with sin, ‘sins of the flesh’ in particular, so much so that “the very structure of confessors’ manuals reinforced the notion of women as primarily, even exclusively, sexual” [Murray 1998: 83].

So far all we see is a strongly supporting picture of how sheelas have tended to be categorised in the literature: as sexual and erotic representations. However, as well as defining women as sexual, the confessors’ manuals also present them as sexually passive. This is not something usually associated with sheelas: they are seen as “aggressive”, not just because of their supposedly overt sexual display but because their aesthetics do not conform to the stereotype of woman as a soft demure thing. In the Middle Ages, sexually pro-active women become associated with sorcery and are seen negatively as ‘seducers’. Again, we have a sense of the witch, and can see how sheelas have become entwined with this negative masculine-contrived image of woman.

Medieval attitudes such as those found within the confessors’ manuals, serve to reinforce the negative stereotype of women, both physically and spiritually. Women are totally defined by their sex, and their souls are gendered because of it. But, sheelas do not quite conform to this notion; as with an earlier point I made, sheelas break the rules. In so doing, they later become equated with the idea of the witch. Jørgen Andersen [1977] endorses this misogynistic view of

sheelas: sexually-defined women viewed as witches because they are powerful ('sexual') images, simultaneously seen as evil and yet associated with warding off evil. Neither Andersen, nor any other author on the subject so far, deals with the conundrum this evaluation produces. The canonical Christian view of women perpetuates the understanding that sheelas, as images of 'women', are thus directly linked to sin and, therefore, 'evil'. Much of this perception is still perpetuated in the current literature (see part one of this chapter). But the understanding of them as apotropaic images has not been adequately dealt with. I hope I fully correct this omission in Chapter Four. The connection of sheelas with notions of witchcraft is dealt with more fully in the penultimate section of this chapter.

Medieval perceptions of the old female body

As some of the sheelas have been previously deemed representations of the 'hag', of old females, rather than accept that this can only mean they are representing one part of the Celtic triple goddess (e.g. Sheridan & Ross [1975]) which is not necessarily the case, it would seem appropriate to discuss what medieval perceptions of the old female body were.

Although old age and ageing were seen in positive terms of having gained wisdom, developed spiritually, and been liberated from passions and earthly ambitions, negative associations seem the greater for influencing the medieval stereotype of old age as found in contemporary texts [see Shahar 1994], consisting of physical and mental deterioration, being seen as ugly, as a source of physical suffering and almost a disease.

The old female body is differentiated from the old male body mainly in relation to the ending of menstrual life. With the cessation of the menses, the blood was thought to remain within the body, rendering the woman a carrier of 'poisonous' superfluous matter which she could no longer eliminate from her body. There is also a distinction made between social class and the ending of the menses. Shahar [1994] cites Albertus Magnus (1200-1280)²¹ that "the women being old have almost no natural heat left to consume and control this matter, especially

²¹ *De secretis mulierum*, attributed to Albertus, cited by Shahar from Jacquart & Thomasset 1988: 75.

poor women ... These women are more venomous than others". Somehow, the notion developed that old, poor women were able to generate poison, either attributed to their 'ugliness' (which was seen, as for all old people, as proportional to their sinfulness), or because of the medieval attitude towards the blood no longer being able to be eliminated in post-menopausal women, or both. There is also a sense of 'woman as witch' in these attitudes, and particularly where an old woman wanted to continue her sexual life. "Sometimes", says Shahar, "she is depicted as grotesque. But it is more characteristic to depict her as possessing secret knowledge which she uses to manipulate people" [Shahar 1994: 168]. These old women are unacceptable as still-sexual beings, are seen as old hags belonging to the lower classes, who give advice about love and sex, prepare potions and are procurers. They were also seen as having evil power. Perceptions of the old female body project an image of woman as ugly, manipulative, and harmful. Like the general stereotype of old age, this too is a stereotype but without any positive attributes (or, rather, they are positive traits inverted or obfuscated: 'wisdom' becomes 'secret knowledge'), and as I discuss later in my section on witchcraft, this perception has strong links with interpretations of sheela-na-gigs.

Before I go on to discuss witchcraft, I want to present ideas about wildness (also associated with notions of the witch figure) which were of spiritual and cultural significance in the Middle Ages. 'Wildness' as a category informs much of medieval imagery, for example, the Green Man, and the Wild Man. Sheelas are not directly related to either of these forms but they are associated with the concept of wildness in their liminality and ambiguity of form, meaning, and locational position.

Wildness

The concept of wildness has a strong relationship with that of 'otherness', ideas about monsters, and the fear of the unknown, as territory, creature, or God. According to Hayden White [1972], the notion of 'wildness' (or in its Latinate form, 'savagery') belongs to a set of "culturally self-authenticating devices" [White 1972: 4] which serves to set boundaries by confirming the value of

dialectical antitheses such as: wildness/civilisation, madness/sanity, heresy/orthodoxy.

These devices, says White, do not so much refer to a specific place, thing, or condition as to “a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and some area of problematical existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the normal or familiar” [*ibid.*]. Obviously, White’s proposition is constrained by its binary positioning, however it is interesting to think about sheelas using such parameters.

It can be argued that sheelas, and other ‘marginal’ sculpture / art are within this general category of that which, when seen as part of the whole, sets out the difference between the acceptable and the unacceptable. This, however, does not work very well for sheelas, as many are isolated from any other sculpture, or even any other imagery, thus there is nothing to compare them with to establish them as a defining mechanism. Also they are found across a broad temporal span, within which other sculptural iconography changes in style and content. But sheelas do not really alter that much. Thus, can they still be seen as representing something which cannot be accommodated easily into conventional sculptural categories? If we accept that medieval sculpture is culturally and spiritually meaningful, what is the role fulfilled by sheelas if it is not to define that which is ‘unacceptable’? If the other sculpture /imagery against which sheelas might be ‘measured’ is either not present or alters over time, this suggests that sheelas actually represent something else other than that which is opposite to the desired state.

Some marginal sculpture may be seen as representing that which is opposite to the desired state even if the desired state is not easy to represent. (This ‘desire’ may be that of manipulative Church control of its populace or a personal spiritual desire within the context of a religious setting.) This view would support a binary categorisation and fits in with a ‘good versus evil’ Christian dichotomy. Rather than representing iconographically a *specific* state (such as that which is not acceptable, morally, spiritually, socially, or otherwise, and therefore, by inversion, the desired state), I argue that sheelas, because of their liminality and ambiguity, represent a state which cannot be defined.

Although I do not see sheelas as representations reminding us of what we are not or what we should not be, (the self-definition by inverse self-definition that White says becomes more apparent in times of socio-economic stress), they do have a relationship with the concept of wildness, wilderness, and 'otherness', even though their 'otherness' cannot be defined. I discuss more fully the concept of 'monster' (a descriptive term which gets applied to sheelas in the literature) which produces imagery representing the 'other' in chapter four, but here I want to dwell on the idea of wildness, because of its ancient and spiritual significance for medieval imagery.

The medieval image known as the Wild Man is closely associated with ideas derived from notions of wildness and wilderness. In relation to 'wildness' as a state of being we may take 'Man' to include woman, but there is also a medieval Wild Woman image, although much less common. It is I think interesting to ask how understandings for these images might have a bearing upon interpretations of sheela-na-gigs.

Bartra [1994] says that the medieval myth of the Wild Man "is a stereotype rooted in twelfth century European literature and art which crystallised as a precise and easily recognisable theme" [Bartra 1994: 2-3], but it can be traced back to the earlier Babylonian myth of Enkidu, which I will refer to in more detail a little later.

There are two strands of influence which contribute to the medieval wild man myth, stemming from ideas of difference concerned with the idea of nature and the human relationship with it found within the ancient Greek and Hebrew cultural traditions.

Greek wildness

For the Greeks, the concept of wildness was defined in terms of what was not considered 'civilised'. The notion of barbarism, which later became attached to ideas about wild men and the noble savage, stems from the Greek idea of 'barbarian' meaning someone who was from outside the 'polis' (city) and who did not speak the same language. This ultimately lead to 'barbarians' meaning

non-Greek peoples and, Bartra says, following the wars with the Persians it also came to mean cruel [Bartra 1994: 10]. The ancient Greeks considered anyone who was not part of their civilised world as backward and barbaric, not having access to 'logos' or reason because these can only be acquired in the 'polis'. It is not difficult to see how such an attitude could produce an understanding of the Wild Man as someone or something outside civilisation (or, to use an Irish analogy, beyond the Pale), but for the Greeks the Wild Man was more connected with 'wild ways', of living with nature unaffected by the ways of the polis, as "non-domesticated beings" [*ibid.*]. No-one outside the city was capable of being fully able to realise their humanity; even certain groups within the city could never become fully human, i.e. women, slaves, and businessmen, according to Aristotle's *Ethics* [White 1972: 24]. These not-fully-human individuals must, therefore, be considered liminal in status, for they are neither fully human nor are they full outsiders as they live within the polis. The concept of the Wild Man is not in the same category for his liminality as these humans not afforded full status of the polis, because at least they are still considered civilised.

The Greeks separated out those who lived under some law from those that lived without the law: the order (cosmos) of the city against the turbulence (chaos) of the countryside. Those who were capable of living outside the city, beyond the rule of law, the Aristotelian view saw as either animals or gods. But, although the Greeks divided humanity into the civilised and the barbarous, they did not defend the notion of a rigid distinction between animal and human nature. Partly this was because most Greeks considered all things to be made from a simple universal substance, or that all things were manifestations of a universal principle.²²

However, White says, the Greeks did not need the concept of a Wild Man, as their mythological figures consisted of a host of species mixtures, products of sexual unions of men with gods, men with animals. The relationship between these mythical beings and humans was quite a different one from that of the barbarian and the civilised man. These images of non-human or quasi-human form represent something else, a place not just beyond the boundary of the civilised

²² See R.G. Collingwood [1945] for more on this.

world but a liminal space which is hard to categorise. Bartra [1994: 18] refers to DuBois' study [1982] to support his theory that centaurs and other wild beings helped define the limit of civilised space. The centaur is an example of a mythical creature seen as being from the wilderness set against the civilised world. They demonstrate the conceptual clash between the wild and civilised existences in their double aspect as a wild man with human characteristics and a wise and just man who was bestial. This pattern is reiterated later in medieval understandings of the Wild Man image.

The characteristic of the wild man who is also wise is a concept found within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and links in with ideas about the wilderness.

Judaeo-Christian wildness/wilderness

The image of the Wild Man is partly derived from the Bible as well as classical paganism. The Hebrew understanding of Nature and wildness is quite different from the Graeco-Roman view. Nature is not equated with wildness for the ancient Hebrews. Eden represents original Nature, when the world was seen as being perfectly ordered and harmonious. After the Fall, Nature becomes chaotic and violent, an enemy against which Man must fight to win back his Edenic humanity. This is quite different, says White, from the Christian interpretation "where the Fall was seen as the cause of species taint (i.e. Original Sin)" [White 1972: 12].

The concept of God's blessing is paramount in an understanding of Hebraic views of Nature/wildness. God created Nature and all that is part of nature, symbolised as Eden. The Fall is the rationale for explaining why humans have arrived at their general condition in the world. The post-Fall humanity is seen as a strain of humanity which can achieve an Eden-like state on this earth by following the Covenant and winning God's blessing. Nature, animals, and humans are all redeemable because all can potentially receive God's blessing; all can be part of that Eden-like state. However, God can withdraw his blessing from a creature, the land, or a people. The result of this is a fall into a state of degeneracy below that of nature (or God) itself. Because God's blessing has been withdrawn the possibility of redemption is virtually nil. This makes such a state extremely undesirable, and it is the one in which the Hebraic Wild Man is placed. "The distinction", says White, "is between that which has the blessing and that

which does not ... animal nature is not in itself 'wild', it is merely not human" [White 1972: 13]. God withdrawing his blessing, for the ancient Hebrews, is seen in terms of His righteousness; thus, accursedness tended to be a fixed thing. The Wild Man, therefore, represented a state of accursedness. For Christians, however, all are redeemable through the sacrament of Divine Grace; whatever physical state of degeneracy the body might fall into, the soul was always salvageable. The Wild Man for Christians, therefore, is seen as a state which one can fall into, representing rejection of society, moral and social mores as well as an anti-type of social existence.

The concept of wildness is clearly different for the ancient Greeks and the Hebrews. Wildness for the Greeks is an 'uncivilised' state; for the Hebrews it is that which has lost God's blessing, a moral state.

However, as well as a moral condition, Hebraic wildness is a place. In the Old Testament, places of corruption or punishment are distinguished from the Void which existed before God created the universe. Apart from the Void, all other places are associated with either blessedness or accursedness. Because wildness is seen as a form of accursedness, it gets transcribed into imagery that represents such a state, places of desolation such as the desert. As White says, the concept of countryside is not the same as that of wilderness, for the countryside is still the place of the blessing, whereas "wilderness stands at the opposite side of being, as the place where God's destructive power manifests itself most dramatically" [White 1972: 14]. Wilderness can also be a condition, a notion that is seen within Christianity where it does not mean only a separation from God, but also a means of finding Him again through desolation. This demonstrates the differing notions of God: Yahweh as Righteous God meting out punishment, and the Christian merciful God redeeming souls through suffering and spiritual reflection.

Bartra [1994: 43] sees the Graeco-Roman creatures of mythology inhabiting the wilderness representing a blend of nature and culture, whereas wilderness for Judaeo-Christian interpretations is seen as the site of encounter, a place of trial and temptation. The Hebraic understanding of desert did not exactly equate with nature but rather "nature deprived of meaning" as a punishment. However, it

was also seen as a place for contemplation and refuge, and in Christianity, redemption.

Monasticism came to be associated with notions of the desert, and spirituality of the wilderness, and through it the possibility of paradise. Hermits internalised the desert as an attitude of mind, as a spiritual state, which monks sought to emulate. Within the monastic tradition myths arose about wild and hairy anchorites (the Wild Man who is also wise that I mentioned earlier). Bartra, in a very interesting section of his book and using the work of Williams [1925], links the concept of the hairy anchorite and the Babylonian hero Enkidu (mentioned earlier in this chapter) [Bartra 1994: 55]. Enkidu is an Adam-like character, who has to leave a wild natural state of happiness because of his love for a woman who seduces him (she is either a sacred whore or a priestess). Before his sexual encounter with the woman Enkidu could talk to the wild animals, as though he were one of them; afterwards, he loses this ability. The hairiness of the anchorite is attributed by Bartra to the possible connection with earlier stories such as this where semi-bestial qualities may be represented by hirsuteness. However, there is a huge difference between the Babylonian story and the Judaeo-Christian version. In the latter, the relationship between the original hero (Adam) and the female (Eve) degenerates into a negative image where the woman becomes symbolic of sin and the downfall of Man. In the Babylonian myth the result of Enkidu's seduction is very positive in that the civilisation of Uruk is created. Enkidu's loss of hirsuteness is symbolic of his release from the wild natural state by the woman for "after making love, the woman gives clothing to the naked Enkidu and taking him by the hand, presents him to men, gives him bread to eat and beer to drink; the spirit of the wild man is filled with joy and his hairy body is shaved and anointed with oil" [Bartra 1994: 56]. To be anointed with oil is to be sanctified, and so the loss of hair, which is as a result of consummation with the woman, can be seen as allegorical for a transfer from one state to another. Thus, excessive hairiness need not mean debased animal nature, but rather when found on humans (as with hairy anchorites) it represents a liminal state of being.

This is borne out by Bartra in an interesting footnote in connection with hairiness, which I suggest is of especial significance for connections with the

Wild Man and Woman and sheelas. He says that the fur or hair of the anchoritic wild man “is not a diabolical feature ... rather it is a feature of sanctity protecting it from evil” [Bartra 1994: 55, footnote]. Thus, the Wild Man and Woman share an apotropaic aspect in their hairiness which may be seen as akin to that of sheelas in their ‘monstrous’ appearance. Sheelas’ lack of hair, as mentioned earlier in the section on the body, can be seen as signifying lack of libido, meaning they are not sexual images; but in the Enkidu myth, he loses his hair as a result of sexual union with a woman, and leaves his liminal state of semi-beast to become fully human and heroic. Where, then, is the connection between these seemingly contradictory ideas? I think it is in the concept of woman (as sacred entity) present in both these examples. But because of the Judaeo-Christian interpretation of woman such an interpretation has been over-ridden and neglected. It does mean that I am suggesting a much earlier than medieval Christian origin for sheelas, but only in essence. The actual imagery is medieval, but the contributory influences are much older.

Thus, the possibility of Babylonian parentage for the hairy anchorite may also further support a link between Baubo (originating at least as an Egyptian myth if not earlier) and connections with sheelas, which I discuss much more fully in Chapter Four.

The medieval Wild Man and Wild Woman

The Wild Man image of the Middle Ages has a double history deriving from ancient Greek and Judaeo-Christian understandings of wildness. The concept of wilderness, especially in its Christian form, aids us in an understanding of the spiritual aspect of wildness. This, in conjunction with pagan notions of wildness (where wild creatures are found in the ‘wilderness’ beyond the polis), creates a symbolically-rich foundation for liminal imagery, such as the Wild Man and Woman, the Green Man, and sheela-na-gigs as ‘wilderness’ entities.

The Wild Man of the Middle Ages is located on the outskirts of the community: living in nearby caves, crevices, the forest, desert, mountains or hills. The Green Man links Christian notions of rebirth and renewal with ancient pagan sacredness

attached to nature.²³ Sheelas are usually found on their own, locationally analogous with the desert or other wild space.

This is the main connection within a Christian context for sheelas with the Wild Man and what he represents, as outsiders, dwellers of the wilderness, but who through their liminality represent qualities which ordinary humans do not possess. Thus, in the Middle Ages

“[Wildness] implied everything that eluded Christian norms and the established framework of Christian society, referring to what was uncanny, unruly, raw, unpredictable, foreign, uncultured, and uncultivated. It included the unfamiliar as well as the unintelligible.”

[Le Goff 1988: 114]

Here we can see how wildness and the grotesque (as concept) and grotesque imagery may overlap. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four the grotesque is something sheelas are a part of.

The Wild Woman of medieval legend was a counterpart to the Wild Man in terms of hairiness (apart from “her gross pendant breasts which she threw over her shoulders when she ran” [White 1972: 21]), and ugliness. However, the Wild Man is also cunning and devious, which can in some versions of the myth make him into a type of magician or at least capable of disguise.²⁴ Unlike the Wild Man, however, who simply grabs women for his own desire, runs off with them, and keeps them, the Wild Woman becomes associated with seduction of men and is able to appear as beautiful in order to do so, regaining her usual appearance during a successful conquest. Thus the Wild Woman has strong affinities with other women of myth such as Celtic land goddesses, sirens and mermaids.

Although the Wild Woman might, perhaps, be thought of as a sort of witch to complement the Wild Man’s magician, in fact this is not so. As White notes, the notion of the Wild Man or Woman is quite a separate one from that of demons, witches, or the devil because as the Wild Man and Woman had no rational

²³ See Woodcock [2003], pp. 136-148, and 158-164 for a recent analysis of the Green Man.

²⁴ See Bernheimer [1952] for probably still the best account of the Wild Man.

faculties they could not self-consciously perform an evil action. The Wild Man was an innocent, without reason, and free from the social constraints that controlled other men. In this way, White says, the Wild Man (and presumably Woman too) became an object of desire, or represented a desired state of total freedom, without the possibility of sin for they cannot know what a sin is as they do not possess reason. The Wild Man and Woman, therefore, occupy “a position beyond good and evil” [White 1972: 22]. Thus, whilst liminal in their locational placement they are also liminal in morality. They are not amoral, they are simply ‘unknowing’. This fits in very well with my suggestions in Chapter Four of such imagery representing the ‘ultimate unknowable’. Whilst appearing ‘ugly’ and repulsive, the Wild Man and Woman in actual fact can represent the sacred. The Hebraic understanding of wilderness and wildness is not in keeping with this as it represents the loss of God’s blessing and as such is an unredeemable state. However, if we take the apophatic understanding of the wilderness even the Hebraic version can be seen as leading to God, for it is through the negation that the sacred can be encountered.

We can thus see from this brief presentation of the Wild Man how ideas about nature, wildness and wilderness may have influenced ideas about medieval iconography, particularly marginal imagery such as sheela-na-gigs. With specific reference to Ireland, Leerssen [1995] discusses how it was perceived as a strange place during the Middle Ages, prior to the discovery of the New World:

“the image of Ireland’s strangeness is current all over Western Europe ... Ireland was on the edge of the world ocean, on the edge of Life As We Know It.”

[Leerssen 1995: 32]

In the twelfth century, the Irish were seen by the British as Wild Men. Leerssen refers to Giraldus Cambrensis who in the 1170s wrote²⁵ that the Irish were “a people of forest-dwellers and inhospitable ... living off beasts and like beasts” [Leerssen 1995: 30]. Ireland was seen by non-Irish as a wild place, and thus it is not at all out of keeping to find imagery such as sheelas in Ireland being perceived by non-Irish Europeans as representative of wildness, even of

²⁵ Giraldus Cambrensis, *The history and topography of Ireland*, tr. J.J. O’Meara, 1982.

paganism. Indeed, I would tentatively suggest that this is another possible indicator that sheelas actually moved iconographically from west to east, rather than east to west which is the traditionally accepted movement of all Romanesque imagery. If sheelas are an indigenously produced image, then such correlation with wildness as defined by the European norm of civility does not fit, because Gaelic Ireland did not have the same system of aristocratic and political centres, such as Royal Courts or capital cities, as mainland Europe, consisting instead of a network of sovereign chiefs and chiefdoms. Power was executed from within both dynasties and monasteries, early Christian Irish society being “intensely competitive in the upper echelons, both lay and clerical” [McCone 1990: 9]. With the discovery of the New World, Ireland lost its status of being on the edge of the known world, says Leerssen, and became ideologically nearer to Europe, which had political implications. Thus, the concept of wildness for sheelas in Ireland, if even seen in this way by the indigenous Irish, perhaps may be better construed as sacred ‘wildness’ where Ireland might be able to draw upon the influence of Celtic spirituality which included nature as part of the holy.²⁶

However, whatever the movement of sheelas was, towards the end of the Middle Ages, the image of the Wild Woman generally in Europe had become assimilated with witches and witchcraft. As Bartra says “there is an indisputable link between the fairies and witches of medieval folklore and wild women” [Bartra 1994: 102]. Sheelas may be seen as a hairless form of the medieval Wild Woman perhaps; but even if not, the link between sheelas and witchcraft is already there, for example Anne Ross’s [1973] chapter which is partly on sheelas is included in a volume entitled *The witch figure*. Why should this be? With this in mind, I now look at medieval understandings of witchcraft, and how perceptions of sheela-na-gigs might have been affected by such understandings.

Witchcraft

Much of the connection between sheelas and witchcraft may be because of the confused understanding of the relationship of sheelas with apotropaia and the evil eye. This I discuss much more fully in chapter four. However, it is useful to

²⁶ See, for example, Mary Low [1996] for more on Celtic Christianity and nature.

try and understand why women may have been seen as witches, particularly when viewed within a medieval historical framework. Bailey [2001] is interested in how the concept of the witch originated.²⁷ The development of the idea of the witch is an important turning point in the history of magic in Europe, for “too often dismissed as unchanging ‘superstitious’ belief, magic was an important and vital aspect of many areas of medieval life” [Bailey 2001: 963].

The notion of witchcraft which lead to the Great Witch Hunt of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries only appeared during the mid-fifteenth century. Before this sorcery was the key concept, which then diversified into sorcery and witchcraft. It would appear the reasons for this are socio-political, and are part of a divisive strategy for control of the masses by the bourgeoisie in the guise of clerics. I am not so interested in the socio-politics behind the changes as in the changes themselves and what this might mean for interpreting medieval imagery such as sheela-na-gigs. For example, images of woman were altered through the process of sorcery becoming witchcraft. Characters from classical literature such as Circe, Medea, and the hag Erichtho, who are seen as female magicians or sorceresses [see Luck 1999], become described as ‘witches’ in later medieval literature. However, the classical examples can be seen as the first to present the image of the ‘witch’ as one of two stereotypes produced from within a masculinist-dominant ideology: the “young seductress using her magic to promote her amorous purposes or else an ugly hag with awesome and sinister power” [Kieckhefer 2000: 33].

So it is the concept of sorcery, as opposed to witchcraft, which is fundamental to an understanding of how magic was originally perceived in the earlier Middle Ages. Conceptions of sorcery began to shift in the late thirteenth century. In late antiquity, magic was officially recognised “as a morally neutral act that an individual could employ towards either beneficial or harmful ends” [Bailey 2001: 963]. Classical ‘daimones’ (which were spirits whom magicians called upon to aid them in their sorcery, and were not therefore malignant as such) became transformed into Christian demons. Demons were seen in early Christianity as the main perpetrators of evil, not the human agent. Thus, the Church did not

²⁷ See also Cohn [1975], Kieckhefer [1976; 2000], Peters [1978], and Clark [1997] for in depth studies of magic and witchcraft in the Middle Ages and early modern Europe.

focus on the persecution of practitioners of magic for centuries. However, by the thirteenth century clerical authorities began to alter their attitude towards the significance of magic and magicians. At this point we begin to see a change in the type of magic practised and by whom. Varieties of learned magic - astronomy, alchemy, spiritual and demonic magic (necromancy) – were studied and practised by the educated elite of Western Europe. The Church became increasingly concerned about such practices, fearing a clerical underworld of necromancy [see Kieckhefer 2000: 151-156].

In addition to the learned forms of magic, which were only found within the male clerical elite, there also existed a widespread system of common magic in Western Europe, which consisted of “common spells, charms, blessings, potions, powders, and talismans employed by many people at all levels of medieval society, including clerics” [Bailey 2001: 965]. Bailey suggests that the clerics needed to fit common magical practices – which did not have a name as such - into the intellectual framework established by learned necromancy, and that this laid the foundation for the eventual construction of ‘witchcraft’.

Nicholas Eymeric was a Catalan inquisitor and theorist of sorcery who completed his *Directorium inquisitorum* in 1376, and whose influence was to lay the foundation for the later clerical conviction in the demonic power and apostasy of practitioners of common sorcery. Within his inquisitorial capacity Eymeric witnessed other forms of sorcery than necromancy but could only think of them as operating in the same way as necromancy, and he quite clearly focused on women as active invokers of demons. This, says Bailey, demonstrates the foundations for the concept of the ‘witch’ but the idea of fully-fledged witchcraft did not occur until the mid-fifteenth century.

Johannes Nider wrote two major works in 1438 which were of significance in the further development of witchcraft as a concept. His *Formicarius* contains extensive clerical accounts of fully-fledged witchcraft or *maleficium* and served as a major source of information for the *Malleus maleficarum* of 1486. Nider's *Preceptorium divine legis* discusses the basics of demonic sorcery rather than the full ‘horrors’ of witchcraft which are described in the *Formicarius*. With these two works there is a clear distinction drawn between fully-fledged witchcraft and the

earlier 'demonic' sorcery (which is seen as the lesser of the two evils), and it is at this point, says Bailey, that sorcery can be said to have become witchcraft in clerical minds.

Within the context of sorcery, the attitude towards women altered from that of traditional healers and midwives,²⁸ practising 'common sorcery', which may have been seen in positive terms, to passive victims of demonic temptation or possession (demonic sorcery), to active invokers of demons (satanic witchcraft), representing a gradual demonisation of women.

The concept of the evil eye, and methods of protection from it, would appear to have similarities with acts of 'maleficium' or common sorcery. Bailey talks of maleficium being concerned with spells cast to prevent human, animal or crop fertility, or spells to destroy crops. Such acts constitute the same targets that are perceived as evil eye targets (see my Chapter Four for more on this). Thus, we can see a possible relationship here between the concepts of 'maleficium', witches and witchcraft becoming interwoven with notions of the evil eye, and being seen materially in the images we call sheela-na-gigs, which are associated with both the evil eye and the idea of witches.

That women become demonised and victimised is in no doubt. Bailey (referring to Kieckhefer [1976] for his figures) informs us that in trials for 'maleficium' prior to 1350 men made up over 70% of the accused; this correlates with the authorities being mainly interested in learned magic at this time. By the second half of the fourteenth century the accused consisted of men (42%) and women (58%). The percentage for women continued to rise over the next two hundred years with over 80% being accused by the time of the great witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This, I suggest, also correlates with a possible change in attitude towards sheela-na-gigs between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. As I argue in my next chapter, sheelas were not originally intended to be seen as negative images of woman, even if that is what they ended up as.

²⁸ See David Harley [1990] for the myth of the midwife witch.



Plate 14: Rahara sheela, Roscommon Museum



Plate 15: Ballinderry castle sheela, Co. Galway, showing six-petalled flower, triskele, triquetra and eight-petalled flower



Plate 16: South window at Ballinderry castle, showing use of six-petalled flower motif at a liminal location



Plate 17: Ballyfinboy sheela, Co. Tipperary



Plate 18: Moate sheela, Co. Westmeath



Plate 19: Sheela at Taghmon, shown in at least secondary situ



Plate 20: Sheela at Taghmon, Co. Westmeath



Plate 21: The C15th church at Taghmon



Plate 22: Fethard Abbey 'sheela'



Plate 23: Fethard town wall sheela, clearly showing ribs and further striation marks



Plate 24: Location of Castlemagner 'sheela'

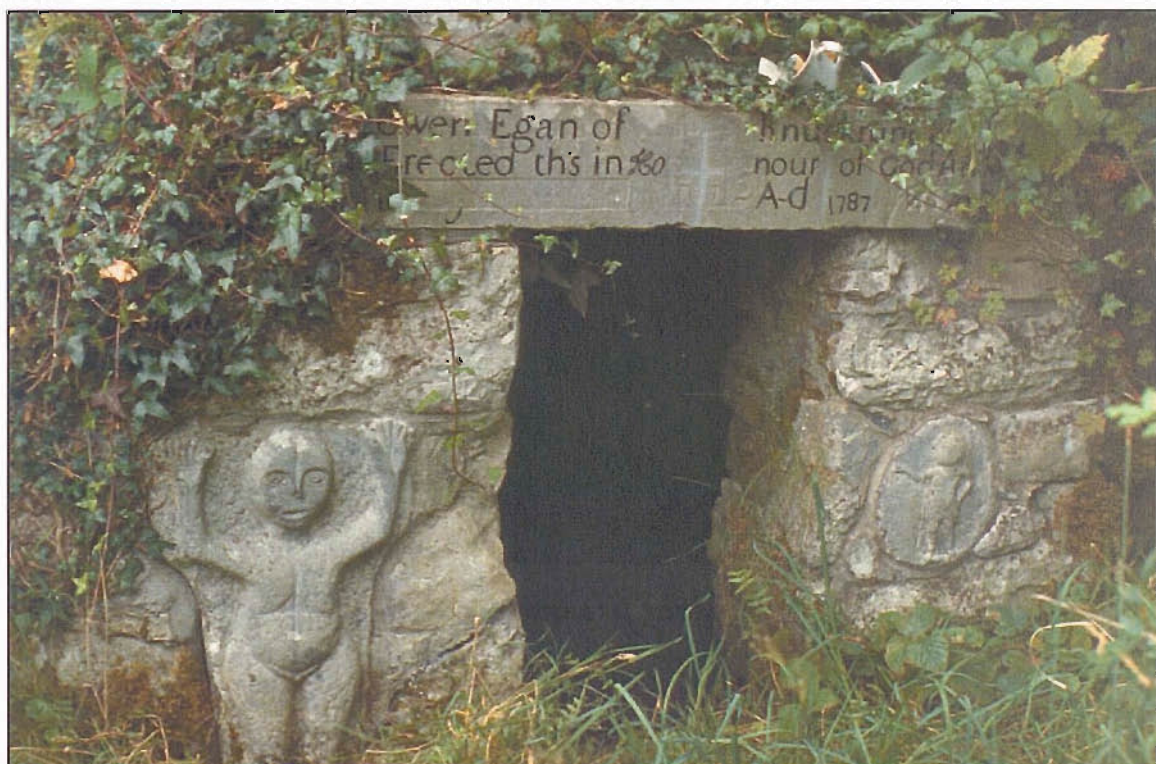


Plate 25: 'Sheela' figure and 'centurion' at Castlemagner



Plate 26: Clomantagh sheela, Co. Kilkenny



Plate 27: Dunnaman castle, east wall window showing decorative work indicative of a high status dwelling



Plate 28: Dunnaman castle, Co. Limerick



Plate 29: Redwood castle sheela



Plate 30: Fiddington sheela, Somerset

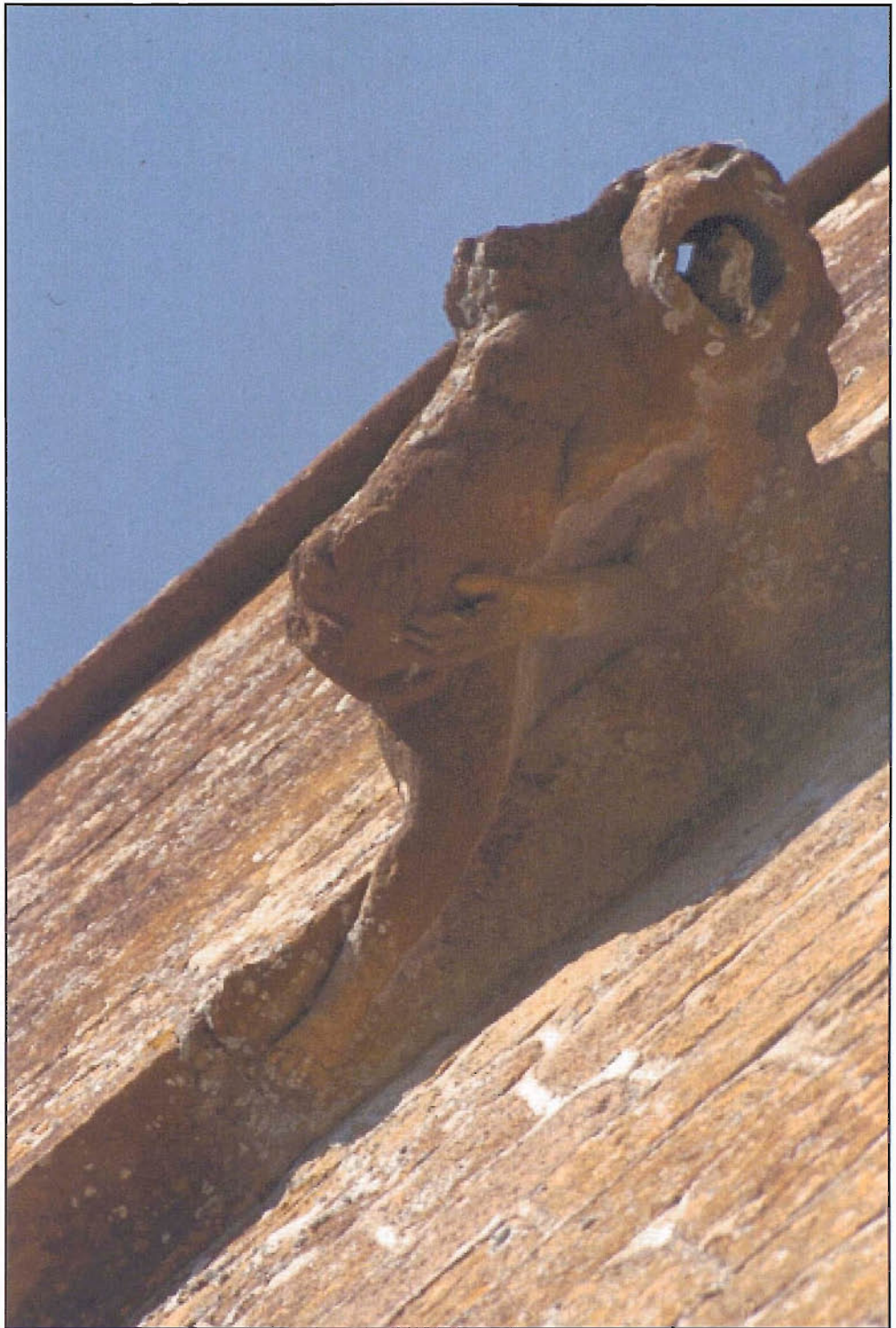


Plate 31: Stoke-sub-Hamdon, Somerset, gargoyle sheela

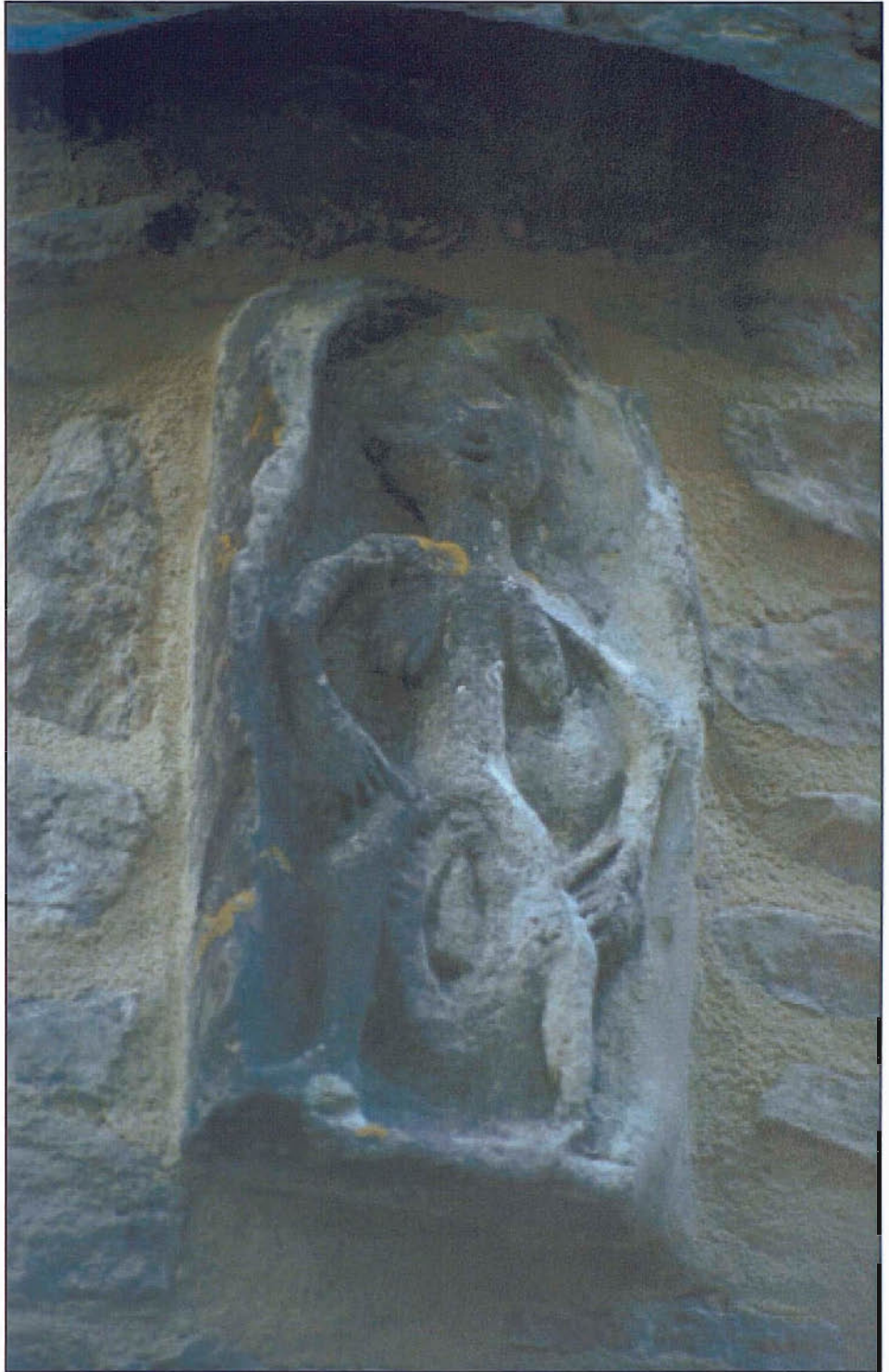


Plate 32: Sheela at Oaksey, Wiltshire

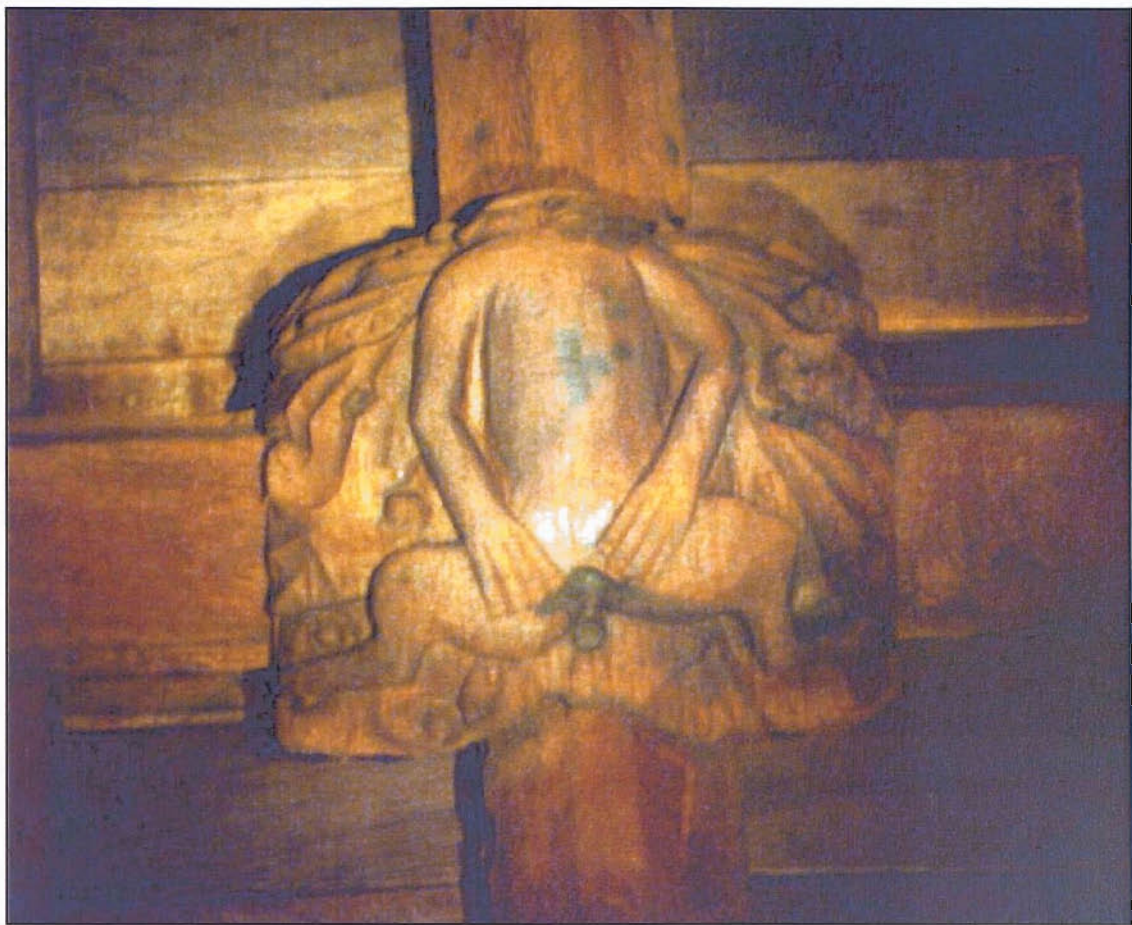


Plate 33: Rare wooden sheela at South Tawton, Devon

Chapter Four

The sacred

Liminality, ambiguity, the grotesque, and apotropaia.

Introduction

In this chapter I investigate concepts which I think have direct relevance for sheela-na-gigs. The notions of the grotesque and apotropaia are used within the existing literature on sheelas (see Chapter Three), but have not been properly researched in their application to sheela-na-gig studies. The concept of liminality is hinted at in the literature, through significance being placed on where sheelas are found on buildings (for example, above or by windows or doorways [Andersen 1977: 96-103; Kelly 1996: 43]), but also has not been properly researched. I thus address in this chapter the wider concept of what liminality is. Are sheelas liminal images and what does liminality mean? Which parts of the body might be termed liminal, and is there a link between these parts and the sacred? Sheelas are described as grotesque [for example, Wilde 1857: 140; Andersen 1977: 81; Kelly 1996: 35], monstrous [Andersen 1977: 47; Karkov 2001: 315], and ascribed an apotropaic function in the literature [Andersen 1977: 107; McMahon & Roberts 2001: 74] without a considered investigation or understanding of these terms. Thus, I fully discuss what the term 'grotesque' means. How does it fit with notions of the monstrous? Similarly, what is apotropaia? Does it have a relationship with liminality, the grotesque, or the sacred?

The sacred is the larger concept within which these other categories fit. A good number of sheelas are found associated with religious buildings: 93% are found on churches in Britain, 30% are in Ireland. In Ireland there may well have been a greater number on churches originally as a further 33% are found in at least secondary situ on neither tower houses nor churches [see Chapter Two, Figure 15]. Given that churches define sacred space, I suggest there must be a relationship between sheelas and the sacred. This relationship is not confined to the religious but is also found within secular settings, particularly for the medieval period.

How might a medieval viewpoint accommodate the concepts of liminality,

ambiguity and apotropaia? In dealing with medieval ideas which have been given modern analytical terms, have these notions been misunderstood by previous sheela-na-gig authors? The idea that the sheela-na-gig is a manifestation of a continuation of a prehistoric and/or pagan Mother Goddess / fertility type spirituality is one that is frequently found within the sheela-na-gig literature. There is often an in-built subjectivity which assumes industrialised western superiority and which suggests that 'Mother Goddess'/fertility type beliefs occur in 'peasant', tribal or rural societies (Sheridan & Ross [1975], Cherry [1992], Roberts [1995], McMahon & Roberts [2001], and Freitag [2004], for example). The implication is that there is a subsequent growth or 'development' towards greater complexity and 'civilisation', associated with the advent of Christianity and, thereafter, literacy. Due to this evolutionary bias, folkloric associations, oral traditions and myths get entwined, perhaps erroneously, as part of some authors' understandings of what sheelas may have represented. It is not that such associations may not be applicable; rather, it is the lack of contextualisation and of awareness of inherited historical bias (from earlier researchers) which confuse the issue. I deal with the Mother Goddess concept later in this chapter for, as well as having influenced and distorted more recent sheela interpretations, it also has more lateral connections with earlier sheela-na-gig research and related researchers namely Margaret Murray, Edith Guest, and Jane Harrison.

Outline of the chapter

In this chapter I argue that liminality, ambiguity, and the grotesque are concepts which are all inter-linked within the greater concept of the sacred and so I firstly discuss what the 'sacred' is. I then move on to presenting what liminality and ambiguity are, and how these concepts relate to sheelas. I return to the sacred and negative theology which has a particular relevance for the medieval period. Various parts of the body had significance in the medieval period, the body being seen as a microcosm of the universe (already discussed in Chapter Three), and so I look at certain parts of the body which might be seen as important for sheela imagery: head, mouth/vagina, eyes. The vagina/ mouth correlation is manifested in notions of ventriloquism associated with the Delphic Oracle myth. I suggest this as a possible influence on sheela imagery, as myth or concept, which became married with ideas derived from negative theology. Having looked at eyes, I move on to the related concepts of the evil eye and apotropaia. It is very important to understand what the evil eye concept is concerned with, and how this is related to apotropaia. They are not the same thing. I think there has been a confusion about this,

generally, in the sheela literature. Discussion of the evil eye brings me on to looking at ideas concerned with spirals and maze-like imagery (fascination and entrapment) and how these relate to the sacred and sheelas. I finally look at Medusa and Baubo as imagery from classical myth, which I suggest are further examples which relate to apotropaia and the sacred. Baubo also has a relationship with sheela-na-gigs, even if not as directly as Murray would have us believe. I suggest that the *concept* of the Medusa (along with the Delphic Oracle myth and negative theology) may have had an influence on those who produced the sheelas originally, and on nineteenth and twentieth century interpretations of sheelas.

The sacred: opening thoughts

The realm of the 'sacred' is itself an abstract concept difficult to define. According to Roger Caillois "the only thing that can be validly asserted is ... that it is opposed to the profane" [2001: 13]. Caillois was looking at ethnographic examples for his work on the sacred. Written in 1939, *Man and the sacred* places Caillois between Van Gennep [1908] and Victor Turner [1969], although Caillois was a sociologist rather than an anthropologist. All three theorists appear to have been influenced by such French functionalists as Durkheim and Mauss. However, it is Caillois who first linked the concept of the sacred with that of the festival. Interestingly, Bakhtin does not make a connection between carnival and the sacred, despite writing at a very similar time.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the festival (or 'carnavalesque' festivities) is a fundamental aspect of Bakhtin's [1984] notion of the grotesque; and the grotesque has a key relationship with liminality and ambiguity. Thus, we have a strong interconnection between the sacred, the grotesque, liminality and ambiguity.

Caillois, like Van Gennep, feels strongly that the worlds of the sacred and the profane are "mutually exclusive and contradictory" [Caillois 2001: 19]. He sees them as two entirely separate and separated concepts, with quite different functions. Part of the reasoning behind such stringent separation, and a vital aspect of the sacred for Caillois, is its connection with the notion of defilement. Incongruously, 'sacred' and 'defilement' are intimately linked. The Latin 'sacer' means 'the one or that which cannot be touched without defilement' [Caillois 2001: 35]. In Greek, 'defilement' also means 'the sacrifice which cleanses the defilement';

the ancient Greek word for 'holy' also means 'defiled'. Caillouis says that small-scale tribal societies "do not separate linguistically the taboo caused by awe of sanctity from that inspired by fear of defilement" [2001: 36].

As I mention later, women are frequently seen in terms of impurity, of being taboo, at specific times, such as menstruation, for example [Douglas 1966; Shuttle and Redgrove 1986; Delaney et al. 1988], or all the time just by being female, such as not being allowed into male-dominated sacred space [Ruether 1990]. But, clearly, if we follow Caillouis' idea, then the sacred and the impure have a direct relationship, to the extent that that which is seen as being unclean is also seen as sacred. It is another version of the grotesque (discussed more fully later in this chapter), contradictory and incongruous.

The profane is everything from which the sacred is absent, so rendered harmless, but also powerless and unalluring. The sacred, however, is seen by Caillouis as a dangerous force, "incomprehensible ... but ... efficacious" [*ibid.*: 22]. Contact with a sacred being or object is dangerous, for the sacred cannot be approached without fear of death, unless culturally sanctioned precautions are taken (special rituals, for example) before exposure to this awesome force.

The sacred, therefore, both fascinates and repels; "one fears it and yet one would like to avail oneself of it", says Caillouis [2001: 36], for it represents that which one most desires. Here can be seen the connection between the sacred and apotropaia, which I also later discuss in this chapter, particularly as manifested in the idea of the Evil Eye.

The sacred is a massive concept which is extremely difficult to define (like the grotesque). To try and understand the sacred better, I have subdivided it into some of its different aspects, which are all inter-linked. As Caillouis [2001] has identified, the sacred is of an ambiguous nature, unifying divine Wrath with divine Love. In its ambiguity it is directly connected with the concept of liminality, which I now look at, with particular reference to sheela-na-gigs, which I suggest are liminal entities.

Liminality

The concept of liminality is crucial to any understanding of sheela-na-gigs. Although attention has been brought to the position of some sheelas by doorways and / or windows [Guest 1937: 374; Andersen 1977: 96; McMahon & Roberts 2001: 13], the symbolism of this liminal positioning has not been addressed. Although the positioning of sheelas by doors and / or windows [39% for sheelas in Ireland, 59% for those in Britain, see Chapter Two, Fig. 14 c&d] can be seen as liminal placements, I view sheelas *themselves* as liminal representations, as a means of accessing the sacred. Before explaining how I arrive at this (perhaps intuitive rather than scientific) deduction, I will discuss the concept of liminality.

The concept of liminality was first identified by the anthropologist Van Gennep in his book *The rites of passage* first published in 1908. Looking at small-scale tribal societies, Van Gennep sees the sacred and profane worlds as entirely separate, with an intermediate stage whereby individuals may pass from the profane to the sacred worlds or vice-versa. Although Van Gennep is hierarchical and evolutionist in his approach (he sees the sacred becoming more and more dominant as “we move downward on the scale of civilisations” [1960: 2], for example), his work is vital to an appreciation of the importance of the sacred and ways to access the sacred. Medieval experience of the sacred and the profane was not as separated as Van Gennep suggests for modern society (which for him means industrial societies in western Europe and the USA), and so can be seen as more akin to his presentation of small-scale tribal societies’ experience of the holy, which he sees as being a significant part of every person’s life, with every rite of passage being marked by sacred acts or ritual.

However, Van Gennep’s view of sacredness is as a non-static, shifting state devised to be an intrinsic part of the function of social dynamics within small scale tribal societies. He sees society as the controlling factor, and sacredness as a man-made thing, created to deal with life-events such as birth, marriage, death. In contrast, it is the abstract sacredness of mysticism which informs my research, and which I feel is more relevant to an understanding of the medieval world, and imagery produced within that world. My understanding of mysticism is more in keeping with that of Denys Turner, whose work I refer to later [see p. 164].

Van Gennep’s approach is useful, however, when we look at his interpretation of

what liminality is and how it is manifested in boundaries and the crossing of magico-religious frontiers. For small-scale tribal societies, a territory will be defined by natural features and the natural boundary might be a sacred rock, tree, or river which cannot be crossed or passed without risking supernatural sanctions. Other boundary markers may be a deliberately positioned object, the installation of which has been accompanied by rites of consecration. This boundary marker (rock, tree, river, object) then sets the delimited territory which becomes intrinsically magico-religious, and prohibitions will exist against certain people entering this space. The area around the boundary is a neutral or liminal zone, and whoever passes from one to the other finds themselves physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time, wavering between two worlds. It is this situation that Van Gennep designates as a transition, and his book sets out to demonstrate that this symbolic and spatial area may be found in all ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another.

Such zones of transition can range from the territory, to the village, a section of the village, a specific house, or even a stone or a beam. Van Gennep refers particularly to the doorway, incorporating the threshold, as a liminal portal [*ibid.*: 20]. The portal symbolises a taboo against entering, representing the boundary between the profane and sacred worlds if of a temple, the foreign and domestic if of a dwelling. Therefore, says Van Gennep, “to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world” [*ibid.*: 20]. The portal may also be the seat of a particular deity, and Van Gennep cites ‘guardians of the threshold’ taking on monumental proportions such as in Egypt, and Assyro-Babylonia (for example, winged dragons, the sphinx, and other monsters), where such beings become the focus for prayers and sacrifices and the doorway itself is of less importance. Here, a rite of spatial passage has become one of spiritual passage.

Sheelas have been seen as similar guardians (described as ‘watchkeepers’ by Andersen, for example, 1977: 96; 98) but the understanding has become confused with limited notions of apotropaic function. They are almost seen as guard-dogs, to protect the building from harm. The *sacredness* of their guardianship has been removed. I return to this aspect in my exposition of what apotropaia really means in the last section of this chapter.

Van Gennep also refers to the concept of pollution. He identifies that it is usually

only the main door that is the site of special entrance/exit rites [*ibid.*: 25]. Other openings, he says, do not have the same quality as a point of transition between worlds. Thus, corpses are removed via the back door or the window, and a pregnant or menstruating woman can only enter/leave through a secondary door. This is to ensure the continued uncontamination of a liminal passage.

This raises an interesting question: if sheelas are seen as representing the female and, therefore, by virtue of this alone, are deemed unclean as is frequently the case [see Douglas 1966; Ruether 1990], why are sheelas positioned by or near doorways and / or windows which may be perceived as liminal portals? As Mary Douglas identifies, notions of impurity are aligned with 'dangerous' states. Liminality is itself a dangerous state because it is neither one thing nor another, but between states. It is uncategorisable. Thus, sheelas can be seen as triply liminal, in that they are representations of the female and therefore 'dangerous'; their 'dangerousness' (in the Cailloisian sense) is also an aspect of the sacred; and they can also be found placed in liminal positions on buildings. I suggest that sheelas actually represent the divine, or at least a gateway to the divine, because of this triple (and, like the divine, uncategorisable) liminality.

Sheelas as liminal ritual objects

Could there also be a connection between ritual and sheelas? Tilley is interested in the relationship between myth, ritual and liminality: "liminal ritual states ... are intimately linked to the telling and re-telling of myth" [Tilley 1991: 140]. Tilley identifies story-telling and iconography as ways of continuing the existence of myths, with iconographical mythical depictions collapsing space-time linearity. In this, Tilley is echoing my own ideas for a non-linear understanding and placement of sheelas, and also their possible involvement as ritual objects. Murray (although, I think, incorrect in her suggestion as to type of ritual) posits that, due to their strong religious connection, sheelas indicate "some form of homo-sexuality was practised by women as a religious rite" [Murray 1934: 99]. It has to be remembered that Murray only observed sheelas in Britain, that is, in the main those found on or associated with churches. However, sheelas continue to be ritual objects to the present day, as objects that are visited and often rubbed by pilgrims, Christian or otherwise.

If we accept sheelas as mediators between the sacred and non-sacred worlds, then their ritual status is more likely. Whatever their ritual involvement, sheelas defy easy categorisation and, as liminal entities, pertain to the ambiguous nature of the liminal.

Ambiguity

Victor Turner [1969] applies Van Gennep's theory of liminality to his anthropological studies of small-scale tribal societies, in particular the Ndembu. It is Turner who first introduces the concept of ambiguity in connection with liminality:

“The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ... are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and persons in cultural space” [Turner 1969: 95].

For Turner, liminal entities are betwixt and between positions created by custom, convention, law and ceremony. They are outside of these things, and as such their ambiguous attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in societies (of which there are many) that ritualise social and cultural transitions. Allegories of liminality are, for example, death, being in the womb, being invisible, darkness, bisexuality, the wilderness, and solar or lunar eclipse.

Turner posits that the passage between states is through a limbo of statuslessness, and in this limbo-position opposites can constitute one another and are mutually indispensable. This is similar to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque festivities where roles are reversed. However, role reversal is not the same as being in a statusless state.

The central concept of Turner's theory of liminality is something he terms 'communitas' (as opposed to 'societas'). Communitas is born out of liminality, where society, or a part of society, becomes unstructured during a liminal period. For Turner, communitas is: “spontaneous, immediate, and concrete, as opposed to norm-governed, institutionalised and abstract” [Turner 1969: 127]. Yet, he says, communitas is only made evident or accessible through its juxtaposition to, or hybridisation with, aspects of social structure. But communitas is difficult to locate.

Turner identifies a whole range of characteristics which he sees as aspects of *communitas*: living on the margin of society, homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property, abolition of rank, humility, and sacred folly, among other things. Such elements may be found in social groups who live outside normal society, such as religious orders, gypsies [see Okely 1983, for example], or hippie communities. Similar figures exist in folkloric examples, 'holy beggars', 'simpletons', and other outcasts, who often hold the key to the whole story, or are in disguise. They are marginal figures, who in a closed or structured society are necessary for the norm group to preserve its identity, says Turner.

A key element of *communitas* is that of low status being necessary for sacred attributes (Jesus, for example). Only in not having power, by being an underling, can you enter a liminal state. By transcending and transgressing the norm, through liminality, you become powerful. Once in this new state of statuslessness, *communitas* can occur.

"Communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority."
[Turner 1969: 128]

In this way, it can be seen that *communitas* and *sheela-na-gigs* have similarities. *Sheelas* are liminal, marginal, and represent females of no (but not low) status. *Sheelas* are always naked and, as such, are statusless.

For Turner, *communitas* is a special state:

"It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy', possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalised relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency."
[Turner 1969: 128]

If *sheelas* somehow represent an aspect of *communitas*, then they are also sacred.

Bynum's critique of Victor Turner

It is useful, I think, to look at how a medievalist might use the theory of liminality, given that my own subject matter pertains (largely, in material evidence anyway) to the medieval period.

Caroline Walker Bynum is a medieval historian who has applied some of Turner's theory to her own work [(1984) 1991] on two major aspects of medieval Christianity: the saint's life as a form of medieval narrative, and the symbol and ritual of the eucharist. Throughout much of her work, she takes a (supposed) feminist view, and espouses some postmodern concepts, such as fragmentation.

Although Bynum tries to find fault with Turner, her criticisms are nit-picking (identifying that he is essentially a structural-functionalist, for example, which is fairly obvious) rather than discerning problems which might seriously undermine his theory. She does not negatively critique Turner's theory in this essay, but rather adapts it to apply to her period of interest, the later Middle Ages. She clearly feels the theory is a useful and original one with broad application, or she would not attempt to apply it to a period which she says he has not adequately covered. She says: "I want to apply what clearly *are* some of Turner's insights – his notions of narrative, of dominant symbol and of the imagery of reversal and elevation – to my work on later medieval piety" [Bynum 1991: 31].

She, of course, uses medieval religious *texts* as her source material, not actual ritual behaviour or ritual artefacts, such as an anthropologist or archaeologist might have access to.

As an archaeologist, not an historian, I am inclined to feel that texts alone would provide limiting and biased evidence, because they were written by individuals of a certain status for a limited audience of a certain status, and provide a narrow focus for interpretation. I am not sure how valid they are for seeing evidence of 'communitas', for example, when texts are clearly a very structured piece of material culture, whereas 'communitas' is unstructured behaviour.

So when Bynum says "there are places where Turner's notions fail to describe what

I find in my research, that those places fit into a pattern, and ... this pattern suggests a fundamental limitation in the Turnerian idea of liminality, at least in the extended or metaphorical sense of Turner's later writings" [*ibid.*: 31-32], then I would say that this is because of the limitations of the source material, not of Turner's theory.

Bynum criticises Turner in his approach to how he sees women as part of the ritual process. Although she acknowledges "his analysis of women's rituals has been both exhaustive and subtle" [*ibid.*: 33], in many places she says he suggests that women are liminal or that women, as marginals, generate *communitas*, and accuses him of 'standing with' the dominant group (i.e. males), and seeing women (both as symbol and fact) as liminal to men.

Here, I think, Bynum demonstrates her lack of understanding of liminality. Women cannot be 'liminal' to men. Liminality is a state, an experience, it is not gender-based, even if its originating social context is (for example, women having to be separated away from men during and after childbirth because of notions of impurity). Although there are liminal zones that may be physical places where men and women are segregated, the zone itself is liminal because it *represents a state that is ambiguous in its nature*. It is neither one thing nor another, that is why it is liminal. So, the gender issue might be of relevance to an understanding of how that, or any, society operates but it is *not* of relevance to an understanding of liminality.

Bynum says Turner needs to stand *with* women as well as viewing things from the male perspective. When he attempts to do this, she says (quite how is not revealed), he assumes symmetry – he assumes the inferior are exactly the reverse of the superior. That is, if the superior in society generate images of lowliness in liminality, then the inferior will generate images of power, she says.

As well as not being quite correct – 'lowliness' is not the reversal of 'power' - this, of course, is a very simplistic understanding of reversal, and I do not think Turner means it in such a simplistic way. I think he understands the complicated nature of reversal, and that it isn't a straightforward inversion. It cannot be in any case, because everyone knows what the game is. All involved in any such reversal know what their status is in 'ordinary' life. This is what makes the reversal have power. So, as with gender, symmetry is not of relevance.

Bynum does not really like the application of Turner's theory to an understanding of women saints in the Middle Ages. Women were controlled by men and therefore their social dramas were incomplete, she says. Yet, conversely, she takes a rather Freudian psychological perspective, based on Chodorow's research [1978], in claiming that women don't experience 'life-crises' in the way men do, and are less likely to use images of gender reversal, because women, raised by women, mature into a continuous self, whereas men *must* undergo one basic reversal, from wanting to 'be' their mothers, to the acceptance of being fathers [Bynum 1991: 43].

This is a very fixed idea of human psychology, suggesting tightly bound stereotypical roles and behaviour. In the Middle Ages, as now, it was most unlikely to have actually been like this; for example, not all children were/are raised by women. Despite Bynum's desire to see the study of gender as "a study of how roles and possibilities are conceptualized; ... a study of one hundred per cent of the human race" [*ibid.*: 17], she does not allow for more varied expressions of gender other than 'male' and 'female', and is constrained by this interpretation.

Bynum says her "work on late medieval religiosity indicates that Turner's notion of liminality ... is applicable only to men. Only men's stories are full social dramas; only men's symbols are full reversals. Women are fully liminal only to men" [*ibid.*: 49].

Revealing her lack of anthropological understanding and evolutionist bias, she says she does not think the problem lies in the application of Turner's theory to late medieval society, which she sees as presenting a greater variety of roles and possibility of choice than for the Ndembu. The problem rather, she says, seems to be that the "dichotomy of structure and chaos" [*ibid.*: 49], from which liminality or *communitas* is a release, is a special issue for elites, for those who in a special sense *are* the structures. A model that focuses on this need for release as *the* ultimate sociopsychological need may best fit the experience of elites, she concludes.

My response to this is that liminality, and spontaneous *communitas*, is not limited to just the privileged few. It perhaps needs structure to achieve it, but not by virtue of merely being the opposite of that structure. The originating structure is not always the dominant and (by Bynum's definition) elite structure. As Turner points out [1969: 132], it is very difficult to maintain spontaneous *communitas*

indefinitely; eventually, or even fairly rapidly, it becomes a structure itself. Elites would not be at all happy to maintain their 'inferior' positions indefinitely; such reversal only works for them because it reinforces their superiority. For those who are 'inferior', liminality and subsequent *communitas* provides a state of limited power, and the possibility of freedom from structure, at least temporarily, with a sort of utopian ideal in between, until new structure is created. I do not see this as an elites-only model. This would be true if only selected persons were allowed to participate in ritual, symbols, etc., but in the Middle Ages, all were involved in religion, for example, to the extent where the sacred and the secular were not segregated. Hence, liminality was open to all, as part of 'life-crises', such as birth, puberty, marriage (whether to a person or to God), and death. As humans, it is not possible to avoid these 'life-crises', whether in medieval or tribal society.

Bynum does not understand the concept of liminality, nor of *communitas*. She also has no notion of the sacred or mystical and this severely limits her critique of Turner's theory. The most useful aspect of her critique is that she acknowledges the application of Turner's theory as valid (in his concept of 'dominant symbols' as polysemic or multivocal) for the Middle Ages.

Victor Turner's theory of liminality and *communitas*, and his understanding of the notion of ambiguity are applicable to medieval contexts, and as such, enable an understanding of sheela-na-gigs, which I see as liminal representations, aspects of the divine. He divides liminality into two main types: rituals of status elevation, and rituals of status reversal. The latter is also to be found in Bakhtin's [1984] notion of the carnivalesque, which I interpret is as a result of *communitas* born out of liminality, and which for Bakhtin is closely linked to the grotesque.

The grotesque

"The grotesque [is] the aesthetic equivalent of liminality."

[Sechter 1994: 423]

The term 'grotesque', and the appearance of any style that might be denoted by this word, dates back to the discovery of Roman 'grottoes' during the fifteenth century. Underground passages of the baths of Titus and the ruins of Nero's palace revealed unusual paintings during excavations carried out in c.AD1480 (and, later,

also at Pompeii). Much of the art work was by a Roman artist named Famulus or Fabullus, the designs on the walls and ceiling presenting “images of beasts fused with animal bodies and birdlike wings, a fish’s tail, human forms that fuse with leaflike patterns weaving plantlife, masklike human heads, and various mythological creatures including centaurs, fauns, and satyrs” [Yates 1997: 6]. These images were used as borders around either white space or identifiable human figures and landscape depicted in classical style.

Art history has appropriated the term ‘grotesque’ for use in defining similar medieval imagery which was marginal, or in the border, too. What is most interesting here is that the medieval imagery existed prior to the defining of the term ‘grotesque’. In other words, medieval artists were already aware of such a style of art (although they did not call it ‘grotesque’ and may not have had a ‘name’ for it at all) and means of representing hybridised creatures, and producing it, well before the fifteenth century ‘discovery’ of such a style. This is also similarly so for the term ‘Romanesque’ which was only devised in 1818, and is therefore a relatively modern term (also mentioned in Chapter Three: part ii of this thesis).¹

Kuryluk [1987] says that the great interest in these frescoes stemmed from their revealing antiquity’s “monstrous face”, relatively unknown until then [1987: 3]. The impact of the original grottoes may have been because of their location, romanticised by their antiquity, and the symbolic nature of such art being found in cave-like underground passages. The term ‘grotesque’ is suggestive of secrecy and of underground burial for, as Harpham [1982: 27] points out, the Latin for *grotto* is probably *crupta* or crypt, although ultimately the word is derived from the Greek *kruptos* meaning ‘hidden’. We might sense from this that the grotesque disturbs and unsettles in an insidious way, and hints at the dark side of the sacred.

The grotesque has always been controversial, says Yates [1997], even from the time of its origins – Vitruvius Pollio attacked it in his *De architectura* of 27BC [Pollio 1934]. However, during the sixteenth century, the grotesque was formative in a different style of painting as expressed in works by Hieronymus Bosch, and Pieter Brueghel the Elder, elaborating the corpus of grotesque works away from border designs alone. As Yates identifies, “in this process the imaginary became even more removed from the realm of the strange and playful, taking on somber tones

¹ O’Keeffe [2003: 26-32] further discusses (and deconstructs) the term ‘Romanesque’.

that spoke of the monstrous and fearful” [Yates 1997: 9-10]. However, I do not think the original ‘grotesque’ art was actually designed to be merely ‘strange and playful’; the monstrous was there all the time. Comments such as Yates’ suggest rather a patronising view of the ancients’ perception of such things, denying the underlying source for these images from myth and religion, but instead implying (ironically) a development towards a ‘deeper’ understanding only seen as achievable with ‘modern insight’.

Sechter [1994] denies the possibility of defining a grotesque style as such, because “as a critical term or as an aesthetic quality [it] remains uncertain” [Sechter 1994: 6]. The grotesque could, therefore, be more correctly identified as an attitude expressed as “a form of art, an aesthetic concept, and an ontologic category” [Sechter 1994: 2]. But it remains elusive still. As G.G. Harpham surmises, “the grotesque is concept without form: the word nearly always modifies such indeterminate nouns as ‘monster’, ‘object’, or ‘thing’” [Harpham 1982: 3].

Kuryluk [1987] strives to seek a general understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of the grotesque. Her approach follows some of Kayser’s [1957] and Bakhtin’s [1984] ideas but also varies significantly. For example, although Kayser and Bakhtin both identify the grotesque as being out of the ordinary, against the grain, they do not elaborate on this point systematically, says Kuryluk. Thus, Kayser limits his view to a mental asylum, a theatre stage, and a dream; Bakhtin confines his to the boundaries of carnivalistic monstrosities. Kuryluk terms these ‘anti-worlds’, accepting them as having a place in understanding the grotesque but saying they don’t go far enough. Thus, she adds further anti-worlds of femininity as opposed to the world controlled by men; childhood as contradicted by the world governed by adults; Satan, hell, paganism, and damnation as distinct from the world of Jesus, heaven, Christianity, and salvation; darkness, and corruption, down below and to the left, as distant from the world of light and purity, high up and to the right; apocalypse, war, and disintegration as contrary to the world of peace, order, and togetherness.

Whilst there is some validity in Kuryluk’s categories, they are still confined to containment within binary oppositions. They do not allow for broader, undefinable expression of the grotesque, expression that is beyond all boundaries and which cannot be confined to being merely anti-structure.

For Kuryluk, the grotesque is a means of understanding a category of art, an aesthetic, of a specific period:

“The grotesque encompasses all these anti-worlds and envelops a relatively stable subculture that can be defined, formally and iconographically, in relation to official or dominant European culture as it existed between the end of the Renaissance and the end of the nineteenth century.”

[Kuryluk 1987: 3]

Kuryluk is mostly interested in the end of the nineteenth century grotesque, in particular in an understanding of Aubrey Beardsley’s artwork. She actually sees the grotesque as having a *function of opposition* to the official culture, existing until the start of the twentieth century. She is, therefore, very much at odds with Sechter’s, and my own, understanding of the grotesque, but Kuryluk’s definition of the grotesque provides a useful example of art historical interpretations for sculpture, particularly Romanesque. It gets divided into the ‘official’ and the ‘marginal’ [see Kenaan-Kedar 1995: 5, for example], as a way of trying to categorise it, but it does not provide us with proper understanding of what the grotesque is actually about.

During the last 40 years or so various research has been undertaken [Kayser 1957; Clayborough 1965; Barasch 1971; Bakhtin 1984; Harpham 1982; Kuryluk 1987] into the problematical concept of the grotesque. Sechter’s doctoral thesis [1994] is a more successful attempt at trying to get at the core of it despite the grotesque being “the epitome of incomprehensibility and confusion” [Sechter 1994: i]. However, the topic still resists theory, she says. This becomes understandable as one goes deeper into the concept.

By their very nature, liminality, ambiguity, and the grotesque do not lend themselves easily to theorising. In resisting theory it also becomes evident how the grotesque, liminality, ambiguity and apotropaia are all part of the same bigger thing: the sacred. To demonstrate this is a fundamental objective of my thesis. Whilst Sechter does not make this connection herself, she at least acknowledges that the grotesque is not definable.

Sechter’s work is important in an understanding of the grotesque as an aesthetic category, and as a philosophical or semantic category, but not in its application to medieval hybrid forms found within so-called marginal sculpture. She is mainly

concerned with literary and poetic expressions of the grotesque, but finds her work can encompass other forms such as visual imagery. Her research “seeks a working definition of the grotesque ... [and] ... a method for description, interpretation and evaluation of those artkind instances which exhibit the specific aesthetic quality named ‘grotesque’ and, as such, belong to a common category” [*ibid.*: iii].

This common category is, for Sechter, “a class of unclassifiabiles: i.e. a general rule for organizing the experience of those aesthetic particulars which cannot be classified in accordance with accepted poetical and aesthetic principles and criteria” [*ibid.*]. In this respect, she says, “the grotesque in the field of aesthetics is a synonym of *liminality* by virtue of naming a category-between-categories” [*ibid.* italics in text].

Sechter cites Clayborough, in his Jungian study of the grotesque, to provide a definition of the incongruity contained within the idea of the grotesque:

“In general it may be said that the chief idea involved in the various senses of the term grotesque is that of incongruity, of a conflict between some phenomenon and an existing conception of what is natural ...”

[Clayborough 1965: 70, cited by Sechter 1994: 176]

It is in this incongruity that the grotesque as a liminal expression is evidenced.

Kayser’s [1957] work is seen by many involved in research on the grotesque as a foundation stone for subsequent research, providing “a basis for theory; a methodological instrument to investigate a very controversial subject” [Sechter 1994: 117]. Sechter clearly makes him a target for dissection. Kayser states that the word ‘grotesque’ applies to three different realms: 1) the creative process, 2) the work of art itself, and 3) its reception, and manifests in a variety of forms which Kayser identifies (monsters; animals such as serpents, spiders, owls, bats; plantlife; tools endowed with life, i.e. the fusion of organic and mechanical; and others).

For Sechter, however, the central element of his argument is that the grotesque is a structure, this structure being the ‘estranged world’ or ‘alienation’. Sechter equates Kayser’s structure with the autonomous character of the grotesque; but at the same time, she says, what he wants to say about art implies a heteronomy which conflicts with this. Thus, ‘estrangement’ as a critical concept within the field of art is contradicted by Kayser’s view that the only way to interpret grotesque imagery is through personal experience and response. By being seen as ‘strange’, the

grotesque image is immediately related to an implied spectator. It is not a thing unto itself, i.e. 'the grotesque' is not a discrete critical concept.

However, perhaps we can take meaning from Kayser's interpretation of the grotesque, for as Yates says, by 'estranged or alienated world' Kayser "means a world that is a transformation of our world, a world in which the familiar and natural elements 'suddenly turn out to be strange and ominous'. There is a metamorphosis of reality and what we confront defies explanation; the world is upside down and the norms and logic we live by do not work" [Yates 1997: 17, partially quoting Kayser 1957: 185].

I, however, cannot accept Kayser's understanding of grotesque as 'estrangement' or 'alienation' because he does not allow for cultural and temporal differences in perceptions of reality. The medieval reality could encompass hybrid creatures because such creatures were thought to exist [see Friedman 1981]. In this sense, 'estrangement' does not apply. Kayser's understanding of grotesque is essentially as a psychological product born out of dreams, madness and the unconscious. Thus, his work is limited in an interpretation of medieval grotesque imagery because he clearly has very set notions, located in mid-twentieth century European psychiatric definitions, of what is 'normal' and what is not. Madness itself is a cultural and political construct; thus perceptions of reality alter according to historical period.

Returning to Sechter, a large section of her thesis is devoted to the notion of the hybrid. This is of direct relevance to an understanding of medieval grotesque imagery, much of which consists of hybridised creatures (human-animal, animal-animal, plant-animal, plant-human). Although I do not classify sheela-na-gigs amongst such hybridised creatures, I do see sheelas within a 'monster' context which the hybrids also fall into. 'Monster' as category is fundamental to the concept of the grotesque. It is also strongly involved in the notion of apotropaia, and I discuss it in more detail later.

The problem I have with Sechter in her notion of the hybrid is that she sees the grotesques in effect as 'hieroglyphics' [Sechter 1994: 194]. Although she sees them as more than an ornamental stylistic device, her conclusion is that they constitute a language, agreeing with Gombrich that "they are not mere designs but signs" [*ibid.*: 193, quoting Gombrich 1984: 281]. I cannot accept the art as language/text

argument, because I see art as a non-linguistically-based expression of human emotional subjectivity, with an almost subliminal source. Some art may be created deliberately to convey meaning in the same way that words might, but in my view this is contrived art, art meant to persuade, or sell an idea. It is not the creative art which has as its source an inner vision, and which is an expression of things that are beyond verbal or linguistic expression.

Sechter's greatest contribution is, I think, in her heroic attempt to understand the grotesque (following ten years of research) and in relating it to liminality. In citing Gombrich again, Sechter inadvertently draws attention to the ambiguity inherent in grotesque imagery, due to its liminal locale, and in this its unsuitability for parallel with language:

“There are no names in our language, no categories in our thought, to come to grips with this elusive-dream imagery in which ‘all things are mixed’ ... It outrages both our ‘sense of order’ and our search for meaning ... It should not be impossible to diagnose the cause of this ambivalence. It lies ... in the ambiguous status of these motifs ... It is not the representation of monsters or monstrosities as such that (the) critics castigate, but the free creations of impossible combinations.”

[Sechter 1994: 210, quoting Gombrich 1984: 256]

The result is an interpretation of grotesque images as representing “unsolvable ambiguity” [Sechter *ibid.*], and that because of this they remain “on the edge of chaos” [*ibid.*]. In using such categories as ‘chaos’ or ‘order’, ‘sense’ or ‘nonsense’, Sechter disallows meaning beyond such categories, which is where the grotesque may be better located. She does not investigate the realm of the sacred, which I see as fundamental in any attempt to understand the grotesque.

However, my final comments on Sechter demonstrate links in her work to presentations in my own. Of particular interest is her mention of the trickster or Fool. The Fool is an embodiment of the grotesque as an incongruous figure who unifies tragic seriousness with comic folly. In Turner's terms, the fool can be seen as a liminal entity where status reversal is employed. The Fool is often a special category of person, who is liminal anyway, even without role reversal, in that they can jest at and mock the authority figure (e.g. court jester) with impunity. Bakhtin [1984] similarly talks of the role of the fool in carnivalesque festivities, and Sechter

also refers to such behaviours as a form of theatre or drama.

Sechter [1994: 465] sees Trickster displaying a dramatic dimension embodied by the rituals or festive forms of Dionysus. Dionysus himself is depicted as a metamorphic or ever-changing mythical figure, she says. Referring to Versenyi [1962], she says Dionysus appears in various forms: as a human infant, a youth, a 'man-woman'; also as a lion, a snake, tiger, and bull, his nature finally dissolving in a whirl. Rather than being formless, this Dionysian ability demonstrates the grotesque quality of being something between categories – to be in a process of Becoming rather than demonstrating attained Being. Dionysus is, therefore, permanently liminal.

There is here, therefore, a relevant link with:

- a) the work of Pseudo-Dionysius [also known as Denys the Areopagite] writing at the end of the fifth /beginning of the sixth century AD, whose work influenced the anonymous fourteenth century mystical work *The Cloud of Unknowing*; and
- b) through this a conceptual flow between the grotesque, ambiguity/liminality, and the sacred/mystical.

This flow can be summarised as Dionysian perpetual metamorphoses, the ambiguous nature of his form ensuring his constant liminal state; the associated Dionysian festivities (Bakhtin's carnivalesque), also viewable as Turner's 'communitas'; the associated idea of the grotesque as non-definable being or entity; and finally, the mystical or sacred, as presented in the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, and others, which I discuss later in this chapter.

However, to continue with my understanding of the grotesque we now need to look at the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975).

Bakhtin's 'carnavalesque' and the grotesque body

Bakhtin's doctoral thesis, published as *Rabelais and his world* (although completed in 1940, not published as a book until 1965), sets out to locate the novels of Rabelais (written in the sixteenth century) in the popular cultural forms of his time, particularly that of carnival. Bakhtin extends the idea of 'carnival' by terming it 'carnavalesque', meaning the varied popular festive life of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. His book actually extends even further beyond the popular festive life

of early modern Europe by “providing a powerfully charged account of the transition to modernity in the culture of the Continent” [Dentith 1995: 66], but its main usefulness for my thesis is in its presentation of the grotesque, or, as Bakhtin refers to it, ‘grotesque realism’.

Bakhtin demonstrates the anarchic, corporeal, and grotesque elements of popular culture, presenting them against the staid seriousness of ‘official’ culture. Grotesque realism emphasises the material and the bodily, and is expressed most evidently in the life of carnival with its feasting, feast of fools, games, and role reversals. “The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” [Bakhtin 1984: 19-20]. But this degradation is not to be seen in a negative sense; rather, Bakhtin wants to stress the *ambivalence* of carnival imagery, for the degradation of the body reduced to its basic functions (eating, defecating, copulating) is a reminder that we are alive and, therefore, also affirms regeneration and renewal.

As well as this focus on bodily functions involving ‘vulgar’ movement from the upper to the lower body, grotesque realism is also characterised by a similar movement from the upper to the lower regions of the medieval hierarchy, and a move from heaven to earth. It is almost a political statement, but, as Dentith remarks, “popular festive forms were not only the cultural property of the ‘people’, but were shared and used by all ranks in society before the seventeenth century” [1995: 74].

Through carnival (first recorded in the Middle Ages as the pre-Lent festival, the ‘carne vale’ or ‘giving up of meat’, but more likely pre-Christian in origin, with ritual feasts such as the Saturnalia), all are involved. As Bakhtin says, “carnival is not a spectacle *seen* by the people; they *live* in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it” [1984: 7, italics added]. Here we have echoes of Turner’s *communitas*.

Laughter is a key element in Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalesque, but it is not Hyman’s “laughter linked to the overturning of authority” [Hyman 2000: 14]. Rather, it is the rampant laughter associated with excess and debauchery, a wild laughter, which taps into some deeper, innate, untamed sense of Being, unleashed through the removal of normative social order. Here we have links with the medieval

concept of the Wild Man (which I looked at in Chapter Three) and, perhaps also, the laughter associated with Baubo in the myth of Demeter, which I discuss later in this chapter when I look at apotropaia. Carnavalesque laughter is also laughter associated with comedy, but it is the comedy of fools and clowns, it “is ambivalent: ... gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, buries and revives” [Bakhtin 1984: 11-12]. It is also directed at those who laugh. In this way the people are not excluded from the wholeness of the world in carnivalesque laughter.

This ‘body’ of people is also made up of individual bodies, and of particular importance in Bakhtin’s grotesque realism is the concept of the grotesque body, both generic and individual.

Bakhtin draws a distinction between the grotesque body and the classical body [Dentith 1995: 67], with a particular emphasis on the grotesque body which is “open, protruding, extended, secreting, the body of becoming, process, and change” [Russo 1994: 62-3]. Although Russo sees the grotesque body as the opposite of the classical body, which is “monumental, static, closed, and sleek” [*ibid.*: 63], I do not see it in oppositional terms. For if the grotesque body is always in the process of becoming, then it is never complete and, therefore, can never be categorised as the opposite of anything. That is the nature of the grotesque. It can be said to *not* be the classical body, but it cannot be said to be its opposite. However, it can be said to be predominantly female. Dentith sees the grotesque body as “the body of generation, and the swellings that indicate this are its breasts and pregnant belly; it is the metaphoric equivalent of mother earth, to which the degradation of grotesque realism returns” [1995: 83]. Bakhtin himself brilliantly conveys his concept of the grotesque body when he says:

“In the famous Kerch terracotta collection we find figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its twofold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness.”

[Bakhtin 1984: 25-26]

In this image we have the incongruous and impossible pairing of old hags with being pregnant. Symbolically, in this imagery, the cycle of life and death is represented. There are elements of this description that also fit the description of some sheelas, although not all by any means. We cannot extrapolate a generalised notion from this, therefore, that all sheelas are representing the cycle of life and death, birth and rebirth, but we can say that it is a part of the picture – but it is “incomplete”. The element of laughter is, ludicrously, present also, again making a link between the sheelas (many of whom are at least smiling if not laughing), the grotesque body, and the essence of Baubo (she who made Demeter laugh by exposing her vulva).

Russo explores the concept of the female grotesque in applying feminist theory to the discourse of carnival (or ‘carnavalesque’), which has “translocated the issues of bodily exposure and containment, disguise and gender masquerade, abjection and marginality, parody and excess, to the field of the social constituted as a symbolic system” [Russo 1994: 54]. The discourse of carnival, Russo says, allows models of transformation and counterproduction to be situated within the social system and symbolically at its margins. Thus, aspects of her work are highly applicable in my study of sheela-na-gigs, where I locate them as at least models of transformation, if not entirely at the margins (because they represent something beyond those margins).

For my interpretation of Russo’s work, however, I am less interested in the feminist focus (due to restrictions of thesis length) than in her understanding of the female body as seen from a carnivalesque / grotesque perspective. I am also wary of Russo’s interest in semiotics as a theoretical focus, given its links with linguistic analysis which does not sit well with my non-acceptance of art as text / anti-linguistic perspective in this thesis.

Reiterating that Mary Douglas [1966], Victor Turner [1969], and Clifford Geertz [1973] see rituals of status reversal as reinforcing social structure, Russo also looks at Natalie Davis’ [1965] argument “that in early modern Europe, carnival and the image of carnivalesque woman ‘*undermined* [my italics] as well as reinforced’ the renewal of existing social structure” [Russo 1994: 58, quoting Davis 1965: 131]. Davis particularly highlights the power of the image of the unruly woman (a concept that might be applied to sheelas):

“The image of the disorderly woman did not always function to keep women in their place ... it was a multivalent image that could operate ... [both] to widen behavioral options for women within and even outside marriage, and ... to sanction riot and political disobedience for both men and women in a society that allowed the lower orders few formal means of protest. Play with an unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society.”

[Russo *ibid.* quoting Davis *ibid.*]

Presumably Davis means a *female* conflict with masculine dominance in an attempt to effect change in the distribution of power.

However, I would say that the idea of the ‘unruly’ woman is still embedded in patriarchal dominant discourse. Why is she seen as ‘unruly’ at all? I suggest her ‘unruliness’ is ascribed to her due to her breaking free from her masculine-defined and controlled role, whether it is seen as unruliness in the legal, personal, or social sense. It is still a masculine construct. Although Russo gives the example from Davis’ book of rioting men in Wiltshire (during the enclosure riots of 1641) being led by male cross-dressers, I do not see this as particularly transgressional of boundaries, and Russo also has problems with it. My reason for not seeing it as a transgression of boundaries is that it still reinforces a binary division of ‘male’ (as dominant) and ‘female’ (as controlled) components of society. There is no ambiguity here (which cross-dressing might suggest); what we have is male appropriation of female imagery to represent unlawfulness. That is exploitation not a transgression of boundaries. A riotous attack by angry women, on the other hand, would be, however, because they would be violating the cultural norm in transgressing that society’s boundary for female behaviour.

In a male dominated culture, it is a transgression just to be female – thus, women are both dangerous and in danger. Seen from a structuralist viewpoint, “women circulate as signs but are not theorized as sign-producers” [Russo (paraphrasing Levi-Strauss) 1994: 66]. If we accept patriarchy as the dominant ideology in a particular society, then the semantics of female imagery, therefore, are dictated by male supremacy. Does this affect an interpretation of sheela-na-gigs? Or, somehow, do sheelas manage to evade such an imprisonment. I believe, because of their

ambiguity, they do. Alternatively, to adapt an idea offered by Mulvey [1985], the view can be taken that sheelas represent certain “psycho-analytical structures of society erupting into gesture” [Russo 1994: 37, quoting Mulvey 1985: 28], although I would still argue that the psycho-analytical structures are produced via patriarchy, assuming ‘society’ is western. As stated earlier, I am not able to apply feminist theory in a fully researched way in this present work. However, I acknowledge and identify that a feminist interpretation of sheelas would produce a highly interesting piece of research.

Referring to Bakhtin’s [1984] work, Russo says that Bakhtin considered the culture of modernity “to be as austere and bitterly isolating as the official religious culture of the Middle Ages, which he contrasts with the joy and heterogeneity of carnival ... the carnivalesque style and spirit” [Russo 1994: 61].

As already mentioned, Bakhtin’s ideas about carnival and the carnivalesque are complementary to an understanding of medieval ‘marginal’ sculpture. The images contained within marginal sculpture are like “the masks and voices of carnival [which] resist, exaggerate, and destabilize the distinctions and boundaries that mark and maintain high culture and organized society” [Russo 1994: 62].

However, Russo does not see carnival as merely oppositional or reactive to the dominant culture. She says:

“it is as if the carnivalesque body politic had ingested the entire corpus of high culture and ... released it in fits and starts in all manner of recombination, inversion, mockery, and degradation” [*ibid.*].

I believe the grotesques and hybrid creatures of medieval sculpture can also be seen in this way. Sheela-na-gigs, however, I think are different. They have one big message, and it is not to do with inversion, mockery, degradation or recombination of body parts.

Drawing from Kristeva [1982], Russo identifies the female body in childbirth as a “privileged site of liminality and defilement” [Russo 1994: 64], echoing my earlier statements from Caillois’ work on the meaning of ‘sacred’. Thus, the female body in childbirth conforms to the Bakhtinian idea of the grotesque body in its production of new life, bloodshed, faeces, repulsiveness and beauty, and as a liminal site in its temporary state of interior becoming exterior, of simultaneous pain and joy, of

ecstatic agony. There are a number of sheelas that represent females in childbirth, one or two associated with attendant bodily emissions (Ballinderry castle, for example), but, in a similar way that not all sheelas are pregnant hags, neither are all sheelas in the process of childbirth. Childbirth clearly is not the only criterion for a link between sheelas and the grotesque.

However, the acceptance of sheelas as examples of the grotesque body has one major potential flaw: is it based on a male construction of the grotesque female body? That is, could the presentation of the grotesque body as female, rather than male, be because such a construction “is founded on the assumption that the male body is the perfectly formed, complete, and therefore normative body” [Miles 1992: 155]? Miles identifies “the most concentrated sense of the grotesque” [*ibid.*: 147] as ‘woman’, and ‘woman in childbirth’ as a grotesque event, only because she views it as framed within a masculine construction of reality. However, I think that because the grotesque transgresses *all* norms, the female grotesque body is not produced as a result of transgressing the male normative body: that would be too straightforward. In any case, Bakhtin refers to male bodies as well in their grotesque protuberances and bodily emissions. The grotesque is so complex that it cannot be reduced to something as (relatively) simple as a gender-based critique which limits itself to the binary of male and female. It is the protuberances and emissions that are important, not whether it is a male or female (culturally constructed) body! Gender as defined in *any* normative way is not relevant to the grotesque. If anything, the grotesque actually produces (or is as a result of?) the most abstract form of gender which is beyond categorisation, which breaks all taboos.

Of the grotesque, sheelas, and monsters

It should be evident by now, that the concept of the grotesque is consistent with the notion of monstrous imagery. In addition, sheelas have been described in the literature as having ‘monstrous shape’ [Andersen 1977: 46], or monstrous attributes “grotesque, hideous and ugly” [Kelly 1996: 35]. Thus, the concept of ‘monster’, as part of the broader concept of the grotesque, needs to be discussed in relation to sheelas.

Sheelas are not grotesques in the same way that medieval hybridised representations are, for sheelas are not hybrids. As I discussed earlier in relation to the concept of the wild man (and woman) in the Middle Ages and other perceptions of wildness, that which is animal, or seen as animal, is used to delineate what it is to not be human. In the context of Romanesque 'formal' sculptural imagery, animals are rarely represented, except as symbols of religious subjects, such as the eagle for St John. In the 'marginal' imagery animals abound, in various hybridised and monstrous form, perhaps representing the antithesis of what it is to be human, or the fear of what becoming de-humanised results in. Sheelas, on the other hand, whilst often described in the literature as 'monstrous' images of women, are nonetheless female and human, and although occasionally are found in association with animal imagery (such as in corbel tables as at Kilpeck, for example), they are most often separate, individual, lone images. In not being associated with animals or animal parts, they are also not concerned with stimulating thought on what it is to be human. Rather they can be seen as provoking consideration of the realm of Being outside humanness or animalness, what it is to be neither human nor animal, but something or somewhere else.

In Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's edited volume *Monster theory: reading culture* [1996], postmodern theory is the guiding ethos, and, therefore, the book is underpinned by the idea of fragmentation, which I do not endorse as a methodological device for trying to understand meaning during the medieval period. However, in his chapter 'Monster culture (seven theses)' are contained some ideas that I identify and develop as foci for attempting to understand, theorise or conceptualise meaning for sheelas.

1) The apotropaic

Etymologically, *monstrum* is "that which reveals", "that which warns" [Cohen 1996: 4]. If we accept that sheelas can be seen as monsters, the etymology of the term gives validity to my assertion that the apotropaic aspect of sheelas is far deeper than the previous literature on sheelas as apotropaic images has suggested. They are warnings *and* revelatory representations: warnings about the sacred and revelatory mechanisms for the sacred. The sacred *is* a dangerous realm.

2) The monstrous body as an ambiguous vehicle

Cohen sees the monster's body as "both corporeal and incorporeal; its threat is its propensity to shift" [*ibid.*: 5]. There is an ambiguity about the monster, enabling a 'shift' between what can be made sense of and what cannot, and sheelas also represent this ability.

3) The problem of categorisation

Monsters (and sheelas) refuse easy categorisation. The monster stands at the limits of knowing – but sheelas represent the unknowable. Now, whilst sheelas are not hybrids, Cohen's discussion of monsters as incapable of classification is also applicable to them: monsters "are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions" [*ibid.*: 6]. Thus, their 'monstrous' nature is part of why sheelas have been inadequately dealt with in the literature. How can they be understood if they can't be categorised in the first place? This is a fundamental mistake in previous sheela-na-gig studies. Attempts at categorisation lead to a dead-end alley of placing sheelas in the limited niches of the (misunderstood) apotropaic and/or the didactic. My understanding of them is that you have to go outside categorisation, transgress boundaries as a researcher, to glimpse what they are about.

4) Monster as non-binary entity

Cohen, unquestioningly, credits the monster with ontological liminality, saying it "appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes - as 'that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis'" [Cohen 1996: 6, quoting Garber 1992: 11]. The monster, or hybrid being, demands a "radical rethinking of boundary and normality", says Cohen [*op. cit.*], and resisting "any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demand[s] instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration" [Cohen 1996: 7], a "non-binary polymorphism" [Cohen *ibid.*, using Hogle's term, 1988: 161].

5) Fear of difference producing the monster

Political or ideological difference is a catalyst to monstrous representation. On a very broad level, the monster embodies difference. The political and the

monstrous, as well as race and the monstrous, are often closely interlinked, the victimisation of the Jews during various historical periods being an example. At another level, gender identity construction can provoke anxiety-based responses if it does not conform to that particular culture's range of 'normality'. As Cohen says, "the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith ... or Gorgon. 'Deviant' sexual identity is similarly susceptible to monsterization" [Cohen 1996: 9].² However, Cohen does not allow for the element of the sacred in this interpretation – the sacred aspect transforms something from being merely 'deviant' and therefore culturally proscribed, into an enabling mechanism that gives access to the Divine, which is outside culture.

6) Monsters as sexy beasts

Cohen suggests that the monster "is transgressive, too sexual, perversely erotic, a lawbreaker; and so the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed" [Cohen 196: 16]. However, the sexual / erotic element of the monster is actually the projection of that particular culture's repressed desires, the culture that produced the monster in the first place. As the monster delineates that which is not acceptable, that which is alien, foreign, unobtainable, different, forbidden, it *represents* these very things, the (perhaps secretly) desired Other/self, and so becomes desired even in its repulsiveness. Monsters are transgressive, but to call them 'too sexual' and 'perversely erotic' is to couch them in a simplistic vision of sexual/erotic desire. Sheelas have, as I have shown in this thesis, often, indeed usually, been seen as 'sexual' and 'erotic'; they are, however, unlike monsters, not necessarily representations of repressed desire (desire being anything which is not allowed, either at a personal or societal level). Their attraction is more connected with entrapment, I believe, an idea I look at more thoroughly in my section on the evil eye.

7) Our need for monsters

"The monster is the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities – personal, national, cultural, economic, sexual, psychological, universal, particular" [Cohen 1996: 19]. With such an all-pervasive platform, monsters clearly are rather important beings, and so Cohen asks the inevitable question: "do monsters really exist?" [*ibid.*: 20], and answers it with the

² The 'dangerous' role of feminine will in the engendering of monsters is also explored by Huet [1993].

predictable reply: “surely they must, for if they did not how could we?” [*ibid.*]. Cohen sees monsters as an essential part of being human, of making sense of the world, and of questioning how we perceive the world, “asking us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression” [*ibid.*]. But I think Cohen is being too beneficent to humans in this explanation; monsters represent the dark side of our natures, the fears, and inexpressible desires, and in so doing they dwell in a dark place, more in keeping with the grotesque. The liminality of the grotesque enables a connection with the sacred again – and I think this is where the value of monsters lies. Unlike Cohen, I do not see my point of reference as being the human; rather the whole point of monsters / ontological liminality is that it takes us beyond the human / non-human dichotomy, into the truly awesome realm of the sacred.

I finally want to look at the work of Braidotti [1994] in connection with the concept of the monster. Braidotti is interested in the concept of monsters as part of her theme ‘mothers, monsters, and machines’, also a chapter title of her book [pp.75-94]. Braidotti sees monsters as “human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily organism” but “they also represent the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek word ... [for] ... ‘monster’, *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful” [1994: 77].

Thus, between Cohen’s *monstrum* and Braidotti’s *teras* something is indicated in the concept of ‘monster’ that is both frightening but also attracts by its wonder or revelation. ‘Monster’ as concept links in well with discussions in this thesis of a) what constitutes the ‘holy’ or sacred; b) how it is also relevant for an understanding of apotropaia; and c) as a result all three things are connected.

From the nineteenth century, in the west, human malformations have been perceived using a scientific (medical and, therefore, masculine-constructed) classification of ‘abnormality’. Bodily differences have been used to label a person by whatever their abnormality is (e.g. a ‘Down’s syndrome’ person, earlier known as ‘a mongol’), and in so doing has arguably stigmatised and negativised them. Drawing from Derrida and other French philosophers, Braidotti is interested in freeing the notion of difference from its limited restriction within western thought, which is based on binary opposition, and as such sees difference only as that which is the opposite to the norm.

Woman as monster

Braidotti traces the association of women with monsters back to Aristotle who, in *The generation of animals*, posits the human norm based on a male model. The production of a female baby is seen as failure of the body to reproduce normally, a male baby being seen as the norm. So, right from the start the female is an anomaly. Aristotle predictably also does not endow women with a rational soul.³ Woman has therefore been equated with abnormality: different, and inferior. This view, intensified by Christianity's ideology about women, has been upheld by western scientific discourse ever since.

"Woman as a sign of difference is monstrous. If we define the monster as a bodily entity that is anomalous and deviant vis-à-vis the norm, then ... the female body shares with the monster the privilege of bringing out a unique blend of *fascination* and *horror*" [Braidotti 1994: 81]. Thus, using this logic, we can see that female representations such as sheelas, which are monstrous 'monsters' (women), are truly apotropaic. However, the monstrous is part of the grotesque, so sheelas as monsters do not represent difference because the grotesque is beyond difference, as I explain later in discussing 'monster' and therefore 'difference' when viewed in positive terms.

Kristeva [1982] draws heavily on the work of Mary Douglas, identifying the maternal body as the "threshold of existence ... both sacred and soiled" [Braidotti 1994: 81]. Kristeva uses the term 'abjection', where the abject "is the space between subject and object" [Nead 1992: 32]. For Kristeva, it is this border between subject and object which is the most significant, the distinction between the inside and the outside of the body. Therein lies transgressiveness and ambiguity.

"[It] is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite."

[Kristeva 1982: 4]

³ See Cadden [1993] for more on Aristotelian influence on medieval concepts of the body, especially the female body.

Braidotti is one of the few writers to make a connection between the abject and the sacred, for she says “the abject approximates the sacred because it appears to contain within itself a constitutive ambivalence where life and death are reconciled” [*ibid.*: 83]. However, she does not discuss why life and death being reconciled might be a part of the sacred. I would say that rather than the abject approximating the sacred, it is a symbol of, or a means of accessing, the sacred. The abject itself can never *be* the sacred, although it might be a sacred thing, invested *with* sacredness. What Braidotti is really identifying, therefore, is that *ambivalence* somehow approximates the sacred. However, she is getting closer to what I understand as the sacred when she says, speaking of the maternal site as both life- and death-giver (‘death’ because death is the unavoidable result of life), “the notion of the sacred is generated precisely by this blend of fascination and horror” [*ibid.*: 82].

Because woman as difference is seen in terms of negativity in western culture, Braidotti concludes that femininity and monstrosity can be seen as isomorphic.

“Woman/mother is monstrous by excess: she transcends established norms and transgresses boundaries. She is monstrous by lack: woman/mother does not possess the substantive unity of the masculine subject. [And] ... she is monstrous by displacement: as sign of the in-between areas, of the indefinite, the ambiguous, the mixed, woman/mother is subjected to a constant process of metaphorization as ‘other-than’.”

[Braidotti 1994: 83]

Ultimately, Braidotti sees woman as monster in a deeply negative way, defined as such by the masculine constructed norm against which woman is ‘difference’. This negative difference is also found in other authors who see western culture dominated by masculine discourse [for example, Miles: 1992]. However, not all writers see difference as negative.

Steve Baker [2000] broadens the debate by extending divisions of ‘norm’ and ‘other’ beyond the categories of male and female humans, to include that of ‘animal’. This is not a new idea, as I outlined in my section on the conception of wildness in the Middle Ages. However, what Baker does is suggest that that which is other, such as the animal, instead of being seen as ‘other’ is *positively* embraced. Thus, impurity, hybridity and monstrosity can be seen as a positively *creative* move, says Baker [*ibid.*: 100]. Ideas about the monstrous were important in discussions of

art in the late 1990s. Mark Hutchinson, for example, looked “at the potential for a monsterology in terms of what it might mean for the relation of aesthetics and morality ... writing ... from the point of view of a monster who makes art” [Hutchinson 1998: 147]. “Monsterology”, Baker says, “was a means by which to explore pleasure and intensity, free of aesthetic and moralistic judgement” [Baker *ibid.*: 101], because the monstrous is outside the normal paradigms for ‘measuring’ aesthetics and morality.

Seeing ‘other’ as negative is the result only if the norm is dominant and sees itself as positive. But if ‘difference’ or ‘other’ is viewed as a positive then that which is not ‘different’ or ‘other’ (i.e. the norm) is actually negative, if viewed in purely oppositional binary terms (which the concept of ‘dominant’ discourse must pre-suppose). How can the dominant discourse accept itself as negative?! It cannot. Rather, I suggest that the distinction of a dominant discourse, in terms of masculine or feminine, is not relevant or applicable in understanding ideas about the grotesque and monstrous. The dominant discourse here is the monster or the grotesque itself.

Using this understanding, the term ‘monstrous’ as applied to sheelas can also be used in a positive, rather than debased or negative, sense. Through this approach we can also get away from the problem of classification as animal / non-human / human form. One of the reasons why sheelas have been described as ‘monstrous’ is because they are difficult to classify and because the monstrous transgresses boundaries. Sheelas seen as part of a medieval version of ‘monsterology’ frees them from the constraints of ‘marginal’ or ‘official’ medieval sculptural form, to exist in their own right, to ‘just be’, not as a debased form, or an antithetical form designed to oppose the formal religious sculpture, perhaps not even to be included in the grotesque and hybridised imagery of the rest of ‘marginal’ sculpture.

To be truly monstrous, the image needs to seriously call into question what it is to be human, and, thus, hybrids, which are part animal and part human, do not do this; they are clearly creatures of myth. But an image of a woman with a massive head, huge vulva and, perhaps, tiny legs, is so nearly human but not quite. Although animal-animal and animal-human hybrids can be seen as monstrous forms in that they are not easily classifiable as either animal / human / non-human, sheelas are more so because they are clearly not animal or non-human (not even in part) at all, but neither are they human. Their ambiguity is more extreme

because they are exaggerated forms of a bizarre version of human femaleness.

Ambiguity, excess, fear, awe, continuous metamorphosis, abjection, liminality, the grotesque, all are linked within the greater concept of the undefinable sacred. And so we are full circle.

The impossibility of 'Sacred' as concept

Rudolf Otto says the 'holy' or the sacred "completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts" [1923: 5]. His vision of what the 'holy' constitutes is not the 'holiness' of moral goodness nor of a rational understanding of God/deity (such as Supreme Power, Reason, or Purpose). Formalised religion is actually comprised of this rational understanding of deity. Using language (i.e. 'holy' texts) to reiterate and reinforce dogma, religion can only present the rational attributes of God, because language purports to convey ideas or concepts. In the construction of dogma Orthodoxy finds no way to do justice to the non-rational aspect of its subject. The word Otto devises for the "overplus of meaning" beyond the moral and rational understandings of 'holy' or 'God' or 'sacred', is 'numinous'. In devising this term, Otto takes quite a different position from Caillois in his approach to the sacred, for Otto is interested in religious feelings and experience, rather than viewing the sacred as a functional category in opposition to the profane. Otto is clearly informed in his approach by his evident protestant Christianity, but his notion of the 'holy' is in keeping with my perception of the sacred.

Otto says the numinous is an objective thing, outside the self. The only expression which he feels is appropriate for the numinous is *mysterium tremendum*.

"... 'mysterium' denotes ... that which is hidden and esoteric, that which is beyond conception or understanding, extraordinary and unfamiliar."

[Otto 1923: 13].

'Tremendum' refers to the element of awefulness (in the sense of producing awe) connoting fear but also hallowedness, inducing 'tremor' in those who are aware of the presence of such holiness. It results in what Otto calls "absolute unapproachability" [*ibid.*: 20].

The grotesque clearly has a place in Otto's *mysterium tremendum* understanding of the 'holy', even though he himself does not recognise this.

Otto leads on to relate mysticism to his idea of the holy, mysticism being where the unapproachability of *mysterium tremendum* is removed by total submission of self to, and immersion in, God / sacred being; or, as Otto puts it " ... Mysticism is the identification, in different degree of completeness, of the personal self with the transcendent Reality" [*ibid.*: 22]. This transcendent Reality equates with the *mysterium* part of Otto's presentation; it is that which is so alien to us that it can be seen as "the 'wholly other' ... quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny'" [*ibid.*: 26].

Again, such a description also fits that of the grotesque.

So, in Otto's idea of the 'holy' or sacred there is 1) a sense of mysticism and the sacred somehow united with the grotesque, and 2) a sense of the terrible attraction of the holy; Otto talks of the element of *fascination*, which is also a significant factor in understanding apotropaia. I will first, however, develop my ideas of how the sacred, mysticism, and the grotesque might be linked, by briefly looking at negative theology.

Negative theology: grotesque mysticism?

The concept of mysticism, and the mystical, as perceived in modern contemporary thought, can be misleading when thinking about medieval mysticism. Denys Turner says "contemporary meaning links 'mysticism' to the cultivation of certain kinds of experience – of 'inwardness', 'ascent' and 'union'" [Denys Turner 1995: 4]. This modern conception of mysticism probably emerged as a result of nineteenth century scholarship [McGinn 1991]. If this is our understanding of mysticism, then, as Turner reveals, the medieval mystics' version is an *anti-mysticism*, for "though the mediaeval Christian neoplatonist used that same language of interiority, ascent and 'oneness', he or she did so precisely in order to deny that they were terms descriptive of 'experiences'" [*ibid.*]. Thus, if we read the medieval mystics' writings from the perspective of modern experientialism then we will make gross errors of understanding, for in effect we will ascribe to them a position which they actually reject.

Denys Turner's objective is to retrieve "the mediaeval tradition of apophatic or 'negative' mysticism" [*ibid.*: 5].

Negative mysticism may be seen as a Christian theological tradition which consciously employed a strategy of disarrangement as a way of finding God. The origin for mystical theology can be seen as the convergence of the 'Allegory of the Cave' in Plato's *Republic* Book 7, and Moses' encounter with Yahweh on Mount Sinai in *Exodus*. This convergence unifies the allegory of the philosopher's ascent to knowledge, read as the allegory of the Christian's ascent to God and associated with excessive light, with Moses plunging into darkness and there finding God. The proponent of this theology, for the Latin Church, is Denys the Areopagite, also known as Pseudo-Denys or Pseudo-Dionysius. Although his true identity is unknown, he was probably a Greek-speaking Syrian monk who wrote at the end of the fifth century into the beginning of the sixth century AD. He wrote as if he were Denys who is mentioned in *Acts* (17:34) as having been converted by Paul on the Areopagus at Athens, and his writings were extremely influential and not seriously doubted until the sixteenth century. His work was translated into Latin by John Scottus Eriugena, but not until the ninth century. In addition to Pseudo-Denys, negative mysticism may be found particularly in the works of two fourteenth century writers: Meister Eckhart, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; and in St John of the Cross (sixteenth century).

In order to find God, therefore, one has to enter darkness. This is the darkness caused by excessively blinding light, a darkness of deep knowledge rather than of ignorance. Pseudo-Denys explains this as the:

"truly mysterious darkness of unknowing ... renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible ... being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united by a completely unknowing inactivity of all knowledge, and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing."

[Pseudo-Dionysius in Luibheid 1987: 137]

Thus, negative theology or mysticism equates with core areas of my thesis. In absence of self there is liminality and ambiguity; through absence of self there is presence of God, the sacred, the holy; in lightness producing darkness, a 'dazzling darkness',⁴ there is ambivalence; and there is a sense of the awe of the sacred.

⁴ From Henry Vaughan's poem *The Night*

That which cannot be directly approached for fear of death – so we have to be plunged into the darkness, in a stateless state. The grotesque fits this negative theology because it, too, embraces the chthonic. Through this chthonios – and only in such darkness - can the sacred be accessed.

Because of its tremendous influence on medieval theology, it is highly likely that negative theology also influenced medieval sculptural imagery. Thomas Merton – a prolific spiritual writer and thinker – sheds some light on this. Although he was a twentieth century contemplative monk (Trappist), his work shows us how little the monk's way of life has altered since the medieval period: "Prayer, reading, meditation and contemplation fill the apparent 'void' of monastic solitude and silence with the reality of God's presence" [1973: 32]. I refer to Merton again in Appendix One, Part B, where I write about the sheela at Bridlington Priory. Here we have a sheela in a twelfth century monastic setting where other marginal sculpture is also present. At St-Michel-de-Cuxa (French Pyrenees), the capitals of the original cloisters are carved with marginal imagery sculpted in the 1130s [Dale 2001]. At Cuxa, amongst the imagery are squatting apes and men, monsters devouring or disgorging other beings, nine-petalled flower motifs, and a mermaid-siren. Although the images of human and ape are naked, it is interesting that no genitalia is shown at Cuxa, thus they are not exhibitionists. Yet they are strange images to find in a cloister setting. However, Merton indicates to us that such imagery may have aided the monks' meditation: "The function of image, symbol, poetry, chant, and of ritual (remotely related to sacred dance) is to open up the inner self of the contemplative, to incorporate the sense and the body in the totality of the self-orientation to God that is necessary for worship and for meditation" [Merton 1973: 106]; "... the realization that God is beyond images, symbols and ideas dawns only on one who has previously made good use of all these things" [*ibid.*: 105]. Rather than distracting from the spiritual life, therefore, sheelas and other sculptural marginal images provided a way of gaining access to the spiritual. To go beyond image is part of negative theology – to 'unknow'. Through such unknowing there develops "an extraordinary flowering of 'spiritual senses' and aesthetic awareness underlying and interpreting the higher and more direct union with God 'beyond experience' ... [and] what is beyond experience has to be mediated in some way ..." [*ibid.*: 106-7]. I suggest that medieval marginal imagery, and sculpture particularly, provided such a means of mediation.

Denys Turner describes the vocabulary of negative mysticism in terms of 'light' and 'darkness', 'ascent' and 'descent', and the 'love of God as *eros*' [Turner 1995: 13]. These are not binary terms as such, for, as outlined above, they are not opposites in the sense of 'either/or'. Rather, they need to exist simultaneously. The love of God as *eros* is of especial interest in connection with sheelas, which often get categorised in a similar, if non-theological, way. I want to apply the theological version to sheelas now.

There has been a misrepresentation in the literature on sheelas in their being viewed as an 'erotic' art object [see, especially, Andersen 1977: 15]. As outlined earlier, this is as a result of the masculine-created art-historical aesthetic categories, and naked female representations being seen as inherently sexual, especially ones that display genitalia. 'Erotic art' is "aestheticized sexual representation" and is the term that "defines the degree of sexuality that is permissible within the category of the aesthetic" [Nead 1992: 103].

That is an acceptable definition for modern western application, but how does it transcribe to a contemporary medieval view of naked female representation? I discussed medieval concepts of sexuality in Chapter Three, but here I want to dwell on the possibility that the naked female form, as particularly represented in the form of sheelas, is not concerned with defining sexuality within an aesthetic category. These are sculpted images found on churches and secular buildings, with a very different purpose than as objects produced for aesthetic consumption. Indeed, sheelas transgress medieval sculptural formal artistic conventions of the mainstream iconographic sculpture.

Whilst 'erotic' may be concerned with sexuality, the word '*eros*', from which it is derived, is concerned with love, albeit, in secular terms, sexual love. But '*eros*' can also be seen in terms of sacred love. The concept of '*eros*' is found in the work of Origen - a third century AD mystic, and Middle Platonist. The Middle Platonists had a strong influence on the early Church Fathers and it was as an interpreter of the Bible that Origen exercised his greatest influence on later theologians. In his Prologue to the *Commentary* on the Song of Songs, he discusses the concepts of '*eros*' and '*agape*', saying that there is no real difference between them except that '*eros*' can be misunderstood (in a carnal way), and so Scripture tends to use '*agape*'

[Louth 1981: 67].

Avis [1989] states that in classical Greek *eros* stands for “passion, ecstasy, madness, [and] irrationality” [1989: 81]. Through this frenzied passion, *eros* becomes self-transcending, which I see as echoing Dionysian liminality.

In this we get a clue as to there being a connection between *eros* and the sacred. *Eros* is an energy which, as Avis states, if manifested as concupiscence “desire[s] to draw the whole of reality into oneself” [Avis 1989: 121]. This is the estranged state of *eros*, not the *eros* of the sacred. Thus, Avis is really referring to *agape* when he delineates two aspects of *eros*: that it drives the human search for God, and that it is experienced as the presence of God [Avis 1989: 128; 129]. In the latter, we have a sense of *eros* as creative energy, where the sense of being possessed by *eros* “is an experience of the sacred in which we touch the hem of God” [Avis 1989: 129]. So *eros* as *agape* is the divine energy that fills the universe and our own being. Avis also points to Pseudo-Denys for providing “the most powerful Christian vision of a universe charged with *eros*” [Avis 1989: 133] in focusing on a yearning for the Beautiful and the Good. This yearning or longing is *eros* (or mystical Love) which, like the darkness of Pseudo-Denys’ negative theology, ultimately allows access to the sacred.

Sheelas, therefore, can be seen in terms of the *eros* that is *agape*. The application of the term ‘erotic’ thus can be used in this sense - and in this sense only. To refer to them as erotic in the estranged, non-theological, modern sense is to deny them their sacred aspect.

Monstrosity revisited: Deformity, negative theology, speech, and body parts

Williams [1996] is interested in the concept of deformity as utilised in medieval imagery and literature. He says, “the deformed functioned more often as a complementary, sometimes alternative, vehicle for philosophical and spiritual inquiry”, rather than as a merely decorative or didactic device during the mediaeval period [Williams 1996: 3].

Williams also refers to the philosophical corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius as being of primary importance in delineating the significance of monstrosity in medieval thought, and supports the connection between negative theology, concepts of

monstrosity, and the grotesque, for he says:

“the deformed discourse, as I have called it, finds its original conceptual basis in the pre-Christian tradition of philosophical negation which, in turn, finds its mediaeval expression in Dionysian negative theology ... especially influential in the eighth through the fourteenth century. The Neoplatonic roots of this tradition are evident throughout the Middle Ages ... [particularly] ... in the theories of symbolism and representation articulated within Christian Neoplatonism, which valorized the grotesque and monstrous.”

[Williams 1996: 4]

Central to negative theology is the idea that God transcends human knowledge utterly and can be known only by what he is not. During the Middle Ages this manifested as a “progressive negation of logical affirmations about the world and the real” [Williams 1996: 5]. In representations of the monstrous, therefore, the indication of what they mean is entrenched in the negative: “the senses *fail* to adequate the mind, the sign is *incommensurable* with the signified, form *cannot contain* being” [*ibid.*: 6].

Williams does seem to be using binaries in his analysis, however, and seems to be supportive of linguistic analogy: sign/signified, form/content. He unequivocally proves this when he says:

“In the Middle Ages all signifying involved language operations in which a sign was attached to a concept of a thing known, and this sign carried with it properties of both the mind that created it as well as the thing known. The best guarantee of escaping the otherwise inevitable error of taking the sign for the thing was to construct signs so deformed and so transgressive of the process of signification itself that confusion of the real with its language construct was impossible” [*ibid.*: 7].

I do not agree with Williams’ suggestion for understanding the creation of deformed images. Firstly, why ‘deformed’? This immediately sets up a binary construct with that which is not deformed (that is, that which is considered the norm) against which the ‘thing which is deemed to be deformed’ is measured. This necessarily also implies a dominant superiorised controlling element for the construction of the subordinate inferiorised ‘deformed’ element. Secondly, Williams does not demonstrate here an understanding of the vital mystical aspect of negative

theology. To know God is to unknow by going beyond knowing. Williams is suggesting negativity as a simple reversal of the positive, rather than a completely beyond-the-bounds conceptualisation, or, actually, non-conceptualisation. This is not the same as just negating 'logical affirmations about the world and the real'. Williams sees negative theology as being based on paradox [*ibid.*: 4], but paradox is only something which is *seemingly* absurd. Negative theology is based, as I understand it, on a loss of conceptualisation, and therefore, the seemingly absurd is negation of concept not loss of it. Paradox suggests, in actual fact, an obscured meaning but implies that meaning can be found. So, from my understanding of negative theology and the grotesque, paradox is not an applicable term because meaning cannot be found; both are beyond meaning.

Despite Williams' structuralist bias (he is writing with a focus on literature, so his approach is not surprising), he still has some interesting and relevant things to say about monstrosity in the Middle Ages.

The 'normal' human body is taken as the ideal against which to measure monstrosity. Isidore of Seville, for example, the seventh century encyclopaedist, provided a taxonomy of the monstrous after having first created categories for the normal human body. For Isidore, "monstrosity is constituted as: 1) hypertrophy of the body, 2) atrophy of the body, 3) excrescence of bodily parts, 4) superfluity of bodily parts, 5) deprivation of parts, 6) mixture of human and animal parts, 7) animal births by human women, 8) mislocation of organs or parts in the body, 9) disturbed growth (being born old), 10) composite beings, 11) hermaphrodites, and 12) monstrous races" [Williams 1996: 107].

The monster, therefore, Williams says, is essentially apophatic in nature, in that it negates the affirmative discourse, and is created out of a need by the affirmative discourse to understand the negative. This is acceptable when applied to understanding physical human 'deformity' which exists in the 'real' world, but is less so when applied to creatures or beings created from the artistic imagination, such as grotesque sculptural imagery. Williams appears to be saying that the affirmative discourse itself creates the monster in order to understand the monster. This does not follow, for why does the affirmative discourse need to create the monster at all? Negation does not exist if all is affirmative. Thus, I see the monster as redundant as a way of understanding negation unless it exists in its own right. However, the need for the monster *can* be seen as a way for the affirmative to

understand *itself*, by acknowledging it is not the same as that which it is not. However, Williams does recognise that the monstrous consists of a “morphology of non-forms” and that the “structuring of [such] disorder is a contradiction” [Williams 1996: 108]. In this, we have a closely similar situation as that which I described in my section on the grotesque.

Monstrous body parts

Although the body would not have been seen in terms of fragmented bits of the body in the medieval period, it is helpful for us with a modern perception to focus on some monstrous body parts to gain some insight into their possible significance in relation to sheela-na-gigs.

The head

A primary characteristic of sheela-na-gigs is a disproportionately large head. The head is accorded a highly symbolic position in the Middle Ages, the human head signifying reason over nature and, therefore, the superiority of the intellect over the physical. As a result, Williams says, it is not surprising that “the head is [the] most often deformed [body part] in order to represent monstrous concepts” [*ibid.*: 127]. He cites the deformation of the head as found in three basic types: 1) multiplication, producing bi-, tri-, or multi-cephalic monsters; 2) deprivation, producing anacephalic monsters; and 3) transformation, of the head into the head of another creature. Other types of monster can be found with a deformed organ of the head or face.

It is interesting to note that Williams does not include a category for the *enlarged* head. As demonstrated in my fieldwork analysis, sheela-na-gigs often have overly large heads in proportion to the rest of their bodies. They do not seem to conform to any of these other categories of head ‘deformity’. I suggest this may be because they are not part of the wider category of grotesque representations found within medieval marginal imagery, but that they are something else, marginal to this marginal category. I also think the enlarged head allows for greater emphasis of the eyes, which is an important apotropaic aspect.

The mouth

The mouth is a portal; as an orifice it is a liminal area for substances to enter or

leave the body. It represents a site for culturally contested and sanctioned behaviour, and symbolises that which is acceptable or forbidden. It symbolises the border between the interiority of the self and exteriority of the physical world, the other. Through the mouth the self deals with the other. Mouth and vulva can be interchangeable, symbolically, and sexually. There is a mouth-vulva equation. Thus, for sheelas, mouth must be as important as vulva. For other medieval images, mouths are linked with regurgitation, swallowing, extruding.

Speech is often attested as being an essential human characteristic, as Williams himself supports when he says “speech [is] the surest sign of humanity” [1996: 127]. I do not consider speech to be as significant an aspect of mouth symbolism as other aspects such as its relationship to the liminal. If speech is reified as humanity it not only excludes examples of humanity, and other creatures, whose communication might not be linguistically based, but also implies a superiority/inferiority dichotomy.

However, speech can be seen symbolically in relation to both animal, human, and non-animal, non-human utterances, such as the wind being the voice of God.

Ventriloquism

Mouth, vagina and anus are interrelated in terms of symbolism and as liminal sites of the body. Ventriloquism is an interesting case in point. In the Middle Ages, ventriloquism was, according to Williams, associated with the devil because it “suggested demonic possession of his victim’s reason” [1996: 143]. The speech of a ventriloquist gives the impression that it emerges not from the mouth but from the stomach, (*ventre* – stomach, and *loquor* – speak, being the Latin translation of the Greek word *engastrimythos*: *en* –in, *gaster* – stomach, *mythos* – word or speech) removing the locus of speech from the head area, wherein intellect and reason lie, resulting in a debased utterance.

Steven Connor [2000] adds a quite different emphasis to the ventriloquist’s art, from which I interpret a spiritual or mystical connection made possible through ventriloquism, due to its divinatory practice. In ancient Greece, *engastrimythos* (i.e. ventriloquists) were thought to have spirits who spoke through their own stomachs. The source for the voice is ambiguous.

The Delphic Oracle myth

The oracle at Delphi is, according to myth, founded on the spot where the god Apollo defeated a huge dragon, Python. Associated with the (mythical) site is the priestess who is seated, in many versions of the story, over a cleft or chasm in the earth, on a tripod, possessed by the presence and power of Apollo, acting as his mouthpiece in a trance or similar condition of ecstasy.

The Delphic oracle is often seen as at the centre of beliefs which emphasise Greek thought and religion as ultimately mysterious and irrational, which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries found support and promulgation in the works of Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison [1903], and E.R. Dodds [1951]. In fact, archaeology has found no evidence to support there existing a chasm where a priestess might have been a vehicle for oracular divination. Neither is there any contemporary documentary or literary evidence to support the stories presented in the mythology and literature of later periods.

Modern scholarship has concentrated on a socio-political placement for the importance ascribed to the Delphic oracle over a period of about 1000 years (from c.700 BC to c.300 AD). However, Connor is interested in a third significant reading of the oracle and that is the strength of the oracle-myth itself. The myth has had a powerful impact on post-Classical cultural and creative elements, particularly ideas to do with the nature of divine utterance. Connor sees Christianity as providing a foundation for perceiving the oracle-myth in negative terms, as a result of 'hostility' towards the pagan cultures of Greece and Rome.

There is no historical evidence for engastrimythic divination and prophecy as presented in the Delphic oracle myth. The content of the prophecies is largely known, but not how the oracles were delivered. Thus, the question needs to be asked: if there is no documentary evidence for a priestess delivering oracular messages in such a fashion then, assuming no other evidence, why has the myth arisen and how has it retained its power?

It is Christian writers who emphasise the ventriloquial aspect of this form of prophecy, Connor says [2000: 51]. This becomes important when, as I later discuss, it is seen as a means of Christianity debasing pre-Christian ideas of the divine.

Any details of the Delphi oracle, therefore, are derived from the myth, the impact of which is no less important or affective than if the practice were in actual fact true. The power of the myth has resonances for my sheela-na-gig study, as I will now discuss.

The pythia (oracular priestess) at Delphi being a female is possibly of great significance given that other oracles (for example, the oracle of Zeus at Dodona) involved only priests as oracular interpreters (significantly, of the wind in the trees). Another significant aspect, for Connor, of the Delphic oracle is the connection between ecstatic prophecy and metaphors of the earth. Many cultures emphasise a relationship between the earth and the feminine, fertility, birth and rebirth, seen in terms of Gaia or the Mother Goddess. Connor identifies the symbolism within the earth / feminine analogy representing what he calls “valuable interiority”, where openings in the earth are highly symbolic. He sees chasms and caves as both “confirmation and transgression of the earth’s power to hold and store items of value” [2000: 52-3]. Caves and chasms in the earth are also, of course, entrances to the underworld and have strong links with the imagery and substance (sub-substance?) of the grotesque, and with negative mysticism as chthonic places.

However, ‘value’ is a troublesome word. In Connor’s use of it he implies a masculine-derived and created construct of the feminine, where the ‘value’ is deemed so by the dominant masculine discourse, and concepts of ‘earth’ are fixed and static. The earth / feminine ‘value’ would perhaps be seen rather differently from a feminine perspective, where change and fluidity would be acknowledged as fundamental characteristics of an earth/woman analogy. A cave or chasm is, after all, a natural part of geological activity. He, predictably, goes on to equate caves or other earth openings with female genitalia, seeing the female as constituted in and by her genitalia only. Connor, therefore, equates the cleft at Delphi as analogous with the vagina/vulva of the priestess just because the pythia is female. There is no evidence for the vagina being exposed as part of the Delphic oracular divination process.

With Christianity, however, a ‘rumour’ developed “that the pythia, or the demon which enabled her to issue her prophecies, inhabited and even spoke from a particular portion of her anatomy: her belly, or more precisely, her genitals” [Connor 2000: 69]. This idea was further supported by theologians such as Origen in his work ‘Contra Celsum’, written c. 246-248 AD, in which he refuted a 2nd

century work 'The true doctrine' by the pagan philosopher Celsus. Celsus claimed Christianity had appropriated and perverted pagan monotheism, and supported the Delphic oracle as a reliable and holy prophetic medium, at least equal in integrity to instances of prophecy recorded in the Old Testament. Origen, predictably, denounced the oracle as being the work of demons. But it would seem likely that it is he who first links the idea of utterances of the 'demonic spirit' through the priestess' genitalia, although he actually only refers to the womb, not the genitalia as such: "'the prophetess ... receives a spirit through her womb; after this, she utters oracular sayings, supposed to be sacred and divine' " [Origen 1953: 396-7, cited by Connor 2000: 70]. By the early sixteenth century this idea had transmuted into an accepted 'fact' of female ventriloquial genitalia. In 1529 Augustinas Steuchas (an Italian bishop at Ghisaimo, Crete) wrote that as ventriloquial women sit "'a little voice is heard to issue from their genitals'" [Steuchas 1529: 139, transl. by Connor 2000: 71]. Steuchas, like Origen, attributes this voice to demons speaking through a female body.

Thus, from at least the third century AD, there has quite clearly been an embellishment and demonisation of the myth of the Delphic oracle, and associated (Judaean-Christian) devaluing of the female body as host. Rather than dispel the myth, such disparagement has only served to reveal and reinforce its long-lasting power.

As an alternative to viewing the priestess (defined by her genitalia) as analogous with clefts or caverns and as a vehicle for demons, I think a more interesting approach is one of the Delphic oracle myth in terms of liminality. The cleft is transgressive to the integrity of the earth at that place; it constitutes a boundary between the interior of the earth and its exterior, and in this sense can be likened to female genitalia, which, in its links with childbirth, allows for the interior to become exteriorised. In this way, both can be seen as liminal zones. The female is more than just her genitalia, however. The mouth, as I mentioned before, is another liminal boundary, mouth, vagina (and anus) being closely related symbolically. All can both receive and expel bodily and other matter. Women in labour find the expulsion of the baby easier if they open their mouths wide [Gaskin 1977], indicating a perhaps more than symbolic relationship between mouth and vulva.

The engastrimythic divination at Delphi links mouth (in its ventriloquial non-use) with *speech* manifested via another part of the body, and in so doing implies

breath, which is another interiorised element becoming exteriorised. At the same time there is the flow of the divine source at work using the priestess as a conduit. So what we have here is the use of the female body as a sacred liminal site, for which vagina/vulva is not the only criterion. It is in this way that I also see sheela-na-gigs, as a representation of a means of accessing the sacred / divine. And, due to the long-lasting impact of the Delphic oracle myth, its influence may well have extended to the imagery as constituted in sheela-na-gigs.

Mouths and vaginas

In medieval perceptions, the mouth and the vagina have a definite allegorical link, particularly manifested in the idea of the *vagina dentata* legend. This is essentially patriarchally-influenced imagery, revealing masculine fear associated with female genitalia. The *vagina dentata* legend has arisen, according to psychological theory, from a (masculine) neurotic dread of sexual intercourse, with many anthropological examples [Elwin 1942a]. In these stories the vagina of the woman contains a set of teeth, activated by intercourse with a man resulting in his penis being severed. There are also reverse legends involving *penis aculeatus*, where the penis is spike-like or has teeth on either side of it and inflicts death on the woman. Although there are far fewer of these legends than of the *vagina dentata*, it is interesting to note that the association of teeth with genitalia is not uniquely female. This would suggest that whilst there is obviously some sexual connotations associated with dentata legends, there is more to be found in an association between the mouth as a devouring device (eating, gorging and disgorging), sexual intercourse, and as a symbol of death. The medieval hell mouth represents punishment meted out to sinners whose souls are accordingly engulfed and eaten by the hell-mouth. The hell-mouth is represented as a monstrous image, a disembodied devouring be-toothed chasm of a mythical beast's mouth (the Winchester Psalter contains a particularly good example). In this instance, the mouth represents a threshold between one realm and the next, between the physical corporeal world and the spiritual, albeit damned, world. Anthropological examples of dentata legends also refer to the notion of sexual intercourse as defiling and somehow causing damage to the harvest [Elwin 1942a: 447] through impurity. Damage to the crop is a significant part of evil eye folkloric belief. There is thus a link between the concept of the evil eye and the dentata, mouth/vagina connection, defilement and danger. There are echoes here of Caillouis' presentation of the sacred. With mouth/vagina as liminal boundaries (and in many of the legends, anus/penis, not necessarily homosexual by any means), and the liminal state experienced in ecstatic human sexual union,

the realm of the sacred is once more arrived at. The danger associated with the dentata legends may be revealing the same fear and attraction associated with the sacred and as manifested through an extreme of human experience in sexual union, which is surrounded in any culture by religious or social taboos, suggesting its highly significant status.

Violence and the mouth

The sex act can be seen in terms of animality and as such equates it, in Aristotelian perception, with the non-, or sub-human. Equating beast with human denotes the sex act potentially as an act of violence, involving a “loss of distinction between man and beast that is always linked to violence” [Girard 1977: 128]. The sex act also crosses bodily thresholds and temporarily enables transcendence of normal reality.

Camille [1993] also links violence with imagery of the mouth, where ripping of animal flesh by other creatures’ mouths is manifested in the trumeau sculptures at Souillac (inner west wall, Abbey church of Sainte-Marie). The Benedictine monks at Souillac were meant to abstain from eating flesh; in addition such imagery refers to the symbolic and spiritual act of eating of the body of Christ in Holy Communion. Camille sees imagery of swallowing (inferring ingestion and regurgitation) as symbolic of death and resurrection, and refers to Bakhtin’s comment that “‘the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth’ ” [Camille 1993: 48, citing Bakhtin 1984: 317]. For the monks at Souillac the violence represented in the trumeau images may have related to themes of mental and physical struggle in their monastic lives. The imagery associated with the mouth is of paramount importance in this because of it being (along with the genitals and anus) a highly sensitised part of the body, rich with “cultural connotations of exclusion, containment, and of course sexuality” [Camille 1993: 50]. Imagery of the mouth may also be more significant for Romanesque sculpture and audiences in representing a dominant oral culture, compared with the more textual formalised later structures of Gothic sculptural form.

The eyes

Eyes only have significance, for the grotesque, if they are protruding [Bakhtin 1984: 316]. In the monster tradition, eyes are significant if they are shining as referred to, for example, in the Book of Enoch where two Watchers, or angels, appear to Enoch in a dream with faces shining like the sun “and their eyes ... like burning lamps” [2

Enoch 1: 4-5, cited in Collins 1997: 50]. These Watchers/angels are referred to in Genesis [Ch. 6] as being the sons of God who copulate with the daughters of men to produce a race of giants. As well as shining, eyes are also significant as depicted in aberrant forms. The basilisk (a serpent-like hybrid), for example, kills with one look from its monstrous eyes, and there are various abnormal ocular representations in classical myth. Argus had multiple eyes, enabling him to sleep with half of his eyes shut whilst keeping the other half open and, thus, from whom nothing can ever be hidden. The cyclops had only one eye in the centre of its forehead, representing partial perception of something not completely revealed. Monocularity and polyocularity are both part of the monstrous discourse where the abnormal eye symbolises the existence of, and points the way to, divinity. The flaming, angelic eye, and the monstrous eye, are also part of the evil eye concept, which Pliny makes reference to as being derived from Greek sources: “Isogonus adds that there are people ... who also bewitch with a glance and kill those they stare at for a longer time, especially with a look of anger, and that their evil eye is most felt by adults; and what is more remarkable is that they have two pupils in each eye” [Pliny *Natural History*, 7.2.16-17, cited by Williams 1996: 151].

The eye, therefore, has a long history of symbolic attributes, and its importance is evident in sheela-na-gig imagery with frequent emphasis on the eye [see Chapter Two, Fig. 8]. Through connections with the cowrie shell, there are also links between eye and vulva.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, there was much debate in the journal ‘Man’ concerning the meaning of the cowrie shell [Driberg 1940; Durham 1940, 1941; Elwin 1942b; Harris 1943; Hornblower 1941; Jeffreys 1942, 1943; Meek 1940, 1941; Murray 1939, 1940a, 1940b, 1940c, 1942]. The cowrie shell represents the vulva as does the eye [Gravel 1995: 119-120].

For sheelas, therefore, where the eye and the vulva may frequently be the most emphasised parts of the imagery, the connection with the evil eye becomes clearer. The vulva cannot be seen as female genitalia in this case. It represents something much greater, and the eye symbolism reinforces this.⁵

⁵ For more recent work on the cultural associations between the eye and the vagina see Stark-Arola [1998] who uses folkloric texts to inform her superb work on women’s rituals in traditional Finland.

Apotropaia and the evil eye

The apotropaic is usually described as a ‘function’ of sheela-na-gigs in the literature on the subject [see Chapter One]. However, although the term ‘apotropaic’ is regularly used in association with sheelas, it is only ever described in terms of being protective, of ‘warding off the evil eye’. What does this actually mean? I want to research this notion further here, because it seems to me that authors have been using this term without, perhaps, understanding it fully. Are apotropaia and the evil eye concept the same thing, for example? Following further investigation into these notions, I also ask how might sheelas be apotropaic, and do they have a connection with the evil eye concept? Apotropaia is another slippery, ambiguous concept; like the grotesque and liminality it is difficult to define. So I turn firstly to the concept of the evil eye (and relate sheelas to it), which will lead us on to an understanding of apotropaia.

The Evil Eye

The ‘evil eye’ is attributed to the perceived, voluntary or involuntary, ability of humans to effect harm towards others or their possessions by looking at or praising a person or their property. Buildings are also subject to the evil eye. Envy is a large component in this folk belief. Typically, “the victim’s good fortune, good health, or good looks – or unguarded comments about them – invite or provoke an attack by someone with the evil eye” [Dundes 1981b: 258]. Protection is found in wearing apotropaic amulets, making specific hand gestures or spitting, and saying special anti-evil eye formulas before or after praising or complimenting someone, particularly an infant. Although the evil eye is a widespread Indo-European and Semitic phenomenon, it is not a universal one. Dundes points to the absence of the evil eye complex in aboriginal Australia, Oceania, native North and South America, and sub-Saharan Africa [*ibid.*: 259].

The literature on the subject is vast [see Maloney 1976; Dundes 1981a; Migliore 1997], with scholarship being traceable to classical antiquity. Both Dundes [1981b] and Migliore [1997] give useful surveys of the history of evil eye study. Much of the earlier modern research [Elworthy 1895, for example] focuses on descriptive instances of the evil eye, identifying objects and gestures associated with the phenomenon. More recent research has approached the subject from

psychiatric, social-psychological, and medical ocular perspectives. For Migliore, these approaches, whilst valid, only provide “a glimpse into the ambiguous nature of the evil eye, and the complex contextual relations within which it occurs” [Migliore 1997: 15].

I would say that earlier approaches to the evil eye and earlier approaches towards sheela-na-gigs appear to run along a similar trajectory. Evil eye research has turned a “vague, ambiguous, but dynamic folk construct(s) into something that is much more definite, specific, and understandable to an academic audience” [*ibid.*]. But in so doing, as for sheelas as well, the meaning(s) has (have) been lost.

To attempt to find meaning in the evil eye complex, Migliore does not focus on the specifics but instead concentrates on the vague, ambiguous and variable nature of the Sicilian-Canadian evil eye complex using ethnographic material. In contrast to Dundes, Migliore does not attempt to “explain the evil eye belief complex in terms of a holistic integrated theory” [Dundes 1981b: 262]. Rather, an underlying theme of his work is that to understand the evil eye one must focus not on the phenomenon itself, but instead on how people interpret and use it in specific contexts. For Migliore, meaning is totally context-dependent, and as “the phenomenon is inherently ambiguous, vague and variable” [*ibid.*: x] he suggests that an understanding of the evil eye entails a shift in focus from trying to ‘objectify’ and ‘explain’ the phenomenon to looking at how people manipulate *mal’uocchio* (the evil eye concept) to generate multiple meanings.

Although not a declared functionalist, Migliore shares some similarities with Victor Turner through his polysemic interpretation and in only viewing the evil eye concept as a social construct. Thus, “the evil eye ... is not something specific and absolute; it is an ambiguous cultural construct whose meaning varies cross-culturally ... open to interpretation, argument, and negotiation within specific socio-cultural contexts” [*ibid.*: 12]. *Mal’uocchio* can be used as a metaphorical device, a symbol, that allows Sicilian-Canadians “to concretise and express their personal experience of suffering in terms of a culturally recognisable idiom” [*ibid.*: 97]. As *mal’uocchio* is a vague, ambiguous, and, hence, flexible, phenomenon people can use it to generate a variety of meanings. Therefore, what Migliore contends is that *mal’uocchio* as metaphor enables people to communicate not only alternative messages but also to endow these messages with added power or meaning.

Could sheelas also be a form of a 'culturally recognised idiom', whilst similarly being capable of various and ambiguous meaning? Given this approach, if their meaning has changed over time, which is highly likely, then there must also be an aspect of them that has retained its cultural significance for their power as a symbol to have remained. This is where the evil eye concept and sheelas overlap.

However, there is a great deal more to the evil eye than modern ethnographic analysis reveals. We need to discover perceptions of the evil eye complex other than the entirely social-context driven.

DiStasi [1981] takes a quite different view from Migliore by focusing on the evil eye complex in terms of it being a belief system, referencing it from within a mythological and partially Jungian perspective. DiStasi has a personal knowledge of the small villages of southern Italy, "where everyone knows everyone else and what everyone else does. This is the atmosphere in which *malocchio* thrives" [DiStasi 1981: 18]. He sees a clear connection between the ideas of beauty, attraction, and the evil eye, where beauty is the culprit. DiStasi's understanding is based on the eye being attracted to something or someone of perceived beauty, and that in so being attracted the admiring eye is automatically 'mal', or evil, and capable of causing harm. Thus, the evil eye is potentially a constant threat.

Following this argument, if we accept that sheela-na-gigs are not 'beautiful' (although this may be a redundant exercise in itself, as beauty is both a highly cultural and personal construct), and that they were not perceived as beautiful during the middle ages, then they do not attract the evil eye. The mistake in identifying sheelas as images to 'ward off the evil eye' has, I think, been made, due to an assumption that their appearance would 'frighten' off the evil eye. But, in actual fact, it is more to do with their simply not attracting the evil eye in the first place. In doing this they protect the building from the evil eye. This is one line of argument.

The evil eye targets are usually the most valuable ones to that particular society, typically children, pregnant women, crops and farm (especially dairy) animals. DiStasi reiterates Dundes' reference to houses being susceptible to the evil eye, for which hereditary specialists are needed to make the building habitable again. This knowledge of the *malocchio* cure is learned by word-of-mouth; there is no guide book. The knowledge is kept within families and it is passed down matrilineally. The

eye itself may be part of the curative spell, such as in the following: “Eyes and against eyes and the little openings to the eyes. Envy splits (or dies) and eyes burst” [DiStasi 1981: 31, based on an 85-year-old’s woman’s experience when she was approximately 19, c. 1915]. The language used here is interesting in its imagery of ‘breaking up’ the eyes or of eyes bursting to get rid of envy which is split by the eyes bursting. The sheela at Taghmon comes to mind with her strange four eyes that are difficult to focus on.

Amulets worn to protect against the evil eye are varied, but a favoured Italian one is ‘il corno’, the horn. DiStasi suggests there is a phallic aspect to the evil eye’s protective amulets and gestures. This may reflect the dominant masculine society, and that the evil eye is ultimately sourced from within female symbolism and mythology. The evil eye, although inverted, is an aspect of the sacred and as such the link with female as sacred is (negatively) reinforced here. In support of this, Priapus (a phallic Roman god) was also known as ‘Fascinus’ and ‘fascination’ is another name for the evil eye. To fascinate is an aspect of apotropaia, which I shall return to when discussing the work of Gell later in this section.

Envy is potentially a good explanation at the root of the social dynamics theory for existence of the evil eye concept. DiStasi suggests that in peasant societies there is often not enough to go round, therefore anyone who has something extra is depriving someone else of it. Dundes [1981b] also applies this theory to competition over liquid or life-stuff (water, milk) and the power of the evil eye to dry such liquids out. The evil eye as a mechanism of social control maintains a balanced or enforced equality among people who live in such peasant communities, ensuring no-one accumulates too much at the expense of others, and thus all in the community may survive. This is, however, a purely functional approach and assumes a static society.

Of more significance perhaps for sheela-na-gigs, particularly in medieval Ireland, is the idea of the evil eye being linked to personal patronage. Garrison and Arensberg [1976] look at the evil eye concept in Mediterranean mixed economies of peasant farmers and nomadic herders. Although they are objectively controlled by ruling bureaucracies, these societies are actually dominated by ‘strong men’ who organise trade and exchange interactions. Garrison and Arensberg see an evil eye ‘event’ as a symbolic restatement of the social structure. I see strong similarities here with tower houses in Ireland which have sheelas on them, for over a long period of time

conflict between land owning families was a constant threat. This restatement includes a 'gazer' (actual or suspected), a 'gazee' (actual or one who feels he may be gazed upon), and the action of the gazee to protect some possession of his or hers by displaying a sign of protection symbolising his patron. Tower houses in Ireland are frequently referred to by the name of the family who owned the land that castle defended, for example the O'Hurley castle at Ballinacarriga which exhibits some defensive features, and also has a sheela-na-gig. It is possible that the sheela in this situation is being used as a symbol of protection for the tower house, not in the same sense as warding off the evil eye, but simply as a signifier – an emblem for the patron - that states retaliation will result from attack. Although there is some validity in my proposal, it does not work for all tower houses. For example, at Clomantagh castle, Co. Kilkenny, the sheela is at least fifty-five feet above ground level and is very difficult to see. Her position must reflect a more subtle symbolic or actual belief.

Gravel [1995] appears to be unique as an author and researcher who is primarily addressing the question of the evil eye phenomenon and who also directly relates it to sheela-na-gigs. He devotes a whole chapter to the subject, but on closer inspection the chapter exists to support Gravel's contention that there is a close connection between the evil eye and the parturient woman.

Gravel is interested in the concept of the evil eye as a 'symbol', not as a representation of an 'eye' or 'the eye'. So he's not interested in 'vision' related ideas to do with the evil eye (e.g. ophthalmic, or the eye as a 'tool' for focusing 'rays' of evil through etc.). He relates everything to do with the concept of the evil eye with fertility – whether of human reproduction or crops – although fecundity might be a better interpretation. He particularly stresses the Evil Eye as symbol rather than as "tangible emanation" [Gravel 1995: xxxiii], as representing the vulva at the moment of 'crowning' when a baby is being born and, thus, the parturient woman. Gravel states quite clearly that he thinks sheela-na-gigs "are depictions of that moment" of crowning [*ibid.*: 81]; he sees sheelas as "ancient symbols of fertility ... likely to have been executed in pre-Christian times but incorporated [in the new church buildings] later" [*ibid.*: 82]. Although I do not agree that sheelas are pre-Christian in their production, Gravel does raise some interesting points concerning notions of symbols, *mana*, and the evil eye for, following Gravel's argument, it is as parturient woman symbols that sheelas may be seen as apotropaic. Whilst it is evident from my research analysis that many sheelas are

clearly not images of parturient women, the exposure of the vulva itself may be seen as apotropaic. This is not because of the fertility aspect that Gravel stresses, but rather because of its deeper relationship with the sacred, which I stress.

Gravel appears to have a fixed view of the parturient woman's facial expression, which for him is only one of pain expressed through facial grimacing; thus, he sees all grimacing sheelas as expressing the pain of childbirth. There may be some truth in this, but there are also images of sheelas which are smiling and may also be parturient, or at least have huge vulvas. The enormous vulva for Gravel also only suggests the parturient woman – he does not see it as perhaps representing something beyond fertility or childbirth.

The concept of *mana*

This term, first taken from the Melanesian language by anthropologists during the C19th (e.g. Müller 1899 [1878]), equates with a 'force' or 'power' which exists in everything. I equate it with the notion of the immanence of 'God'. It is the same concept, and from a spiritual point of view, the same 'power' or 'force'. However, it tends to get misinterpreted within the modern Western mindset as something external or superior to the natural world ('supranatural'); *mana*, however, whilst being an awesome power is also very much "an intrinsic feature of the natural order" [Wax & Wax 1962]. This is how it is viewed by those who do not separate the spiritual or 'magical' from everyday activities and existence; thus, it can equally be seen as an essential aspect of small scale tribal societies, medieval thought and culture, modern Benedictine spirituality, and modern paganism.

Mary Douglas [1975: 73-82] has criticised the modern Western view of this force which personalises it and assumes 'primitive' peoples perceive of individual spirits such as the 'spirit of the forest' or the 'goddess of fertility', whereas a closer understanding might be a less specific *mana* of the forest or of fertility.

Everything has *mana* including gestures, language, witchcraft, and, according to Gravel, also the Evil Eye. It is because of *mana*, he says, that it becomes possible to link the concept of envy and the evil eye. A belief in the intrinsic power of something allows that thing (in this case the evil eye concept) to have power. Gravel clearly does not grasp the true meaning of *mana*, however, because it is not a 'belief' in it

which is important; rather, it is the acknowledgement that *mana* exists. Like God, it just 'is'. We exaggerate our importance as human beings by saying it is our 'belief' in it which is important; this 'power' or 'force' exists anyway – and we are aspects of it. There are many forms of *mana* and all are part of *mana*. *Mana* can be destructive or beneficial – these are both aspects of *mana*. As humans we can exude negative or detrimental *mana*, and this would be where the Evil Eye concept and *mana* overlap. For Gravel, particularly, symbols have *mana* [1995: 53]; he identifies the Evil Eye as a symbol: therefore it has *mana*.

What Gravel does not point out is the sacred aspect; symbols are ambiguous and polysemic – aspects which I identify as necessary for the presence of the sacred. The link suggested by Gravel between symbols and *mana* also points to this sacred presence or means of accessing the sacred.

Why is it the evil eye?

Two ways of gaining insight into this are from anthropological information and ancient classical thought. Among the Amhara of Ethiopia, for example, there exists the idea of 'eating' others with the eyes [Reminick 1974]. This idea would appear to be connected with capturing what you look at with the stare, and about engulfing. There is here, I think, a connection between mouth, vulva, and eye: mouth as a literal eating mechanism, also as a symbolic engulfing of substance (as in the medieval Hell Mouth imagery); vulva, in its connection with *vagina dentata* and mouth; and eye in its visual capturing of an image. The latter is frequently acknowledged in the anthropological literature, where European researchers have attempted to photograph indigenous tribal people and have met with resistance as they believe the capturing of their image is thought to steal their souls. The camera is like an eye.

This notion of the loss of soul is also found within ancient classical thought. Onians [1951] states that the earliest Greeks divided the soul into two parts:

- 1) *thymos*: the breath soul seated in the lungs and associated with blood, breath, thought, and speech. The *thymos* was the essence of waking consciousness, destroyed at death. The senses were thought to be manifestations of this soul: the eyes breathed a hot vapour or flame in vision; to 'look at' was to 'breathe at' [Onians 1951: 75]. Eyes, therefore, were in this sense, consciousness. In Latin,

this conscious soul is the *animus*.

- 2) *psyche*: in Latin this is the *anima* or *genius*, and is akin to the unconscious. The seat of this second soul was variously in the head, the spinal column, the knees, and the thighbone. It manifested in the body as fat or marrow (thereby creating a connection with olive oil, which for DiStasi is significant in the ritual cure for evil eye effects which necessitates a mixture of oil and water). The essence of this soul, however, was vapour, and related to the body as vapour is to liquid. Thus, heat could cause it to vaporise and, therefore, leave the body. This soul was operative in sleep as dreams, and survived the body after death. Possibly its most important function was as the generative force of life and was seen by patriarchal ancient Greek culture as manifested in seed and semen, all manifestations of male strength and sex (beard, hair, horns), and believed to manifest pre-eminently in mature males but not in females or boys before puberty. It was also perceived as a binding force, for the body and also the universe. It became unloosed in sleep, in love, or in grief (all liminal states), and the body would then lose its strength.

DiStasi [1981: 79] says the original evil eye amulet may have been a cord tied around a part of the body, for example, the wrist, to emulate the soul's binding force. In this suggestion, the evil eye would have been viewed as a mechanism which could unbind the soul. The Romans also had a custom of giving a child a protective necklace containing a 'fascinum' to ward off the evil eye to wear until he or she reached puberty, to protect the child's immature psyche-soul and keep it bound.

However, by the fifth century BC the terms *thymos* and *psyche* were being used interchangeably to refer to the soul. Thus, eyes, originally associated with *thymos* – consciousness – came to be associated with soul in general.

Taboos associated with the eye bear the same message for DiStasi. He cites the example of the sixteenth century Arabian tale 'The perfumed garden' in which there is a warning that looking into the vagina is injurious to the eye. This, I suggest, is more to do with the sacredness associated with that part of the female anatomy, an idea borne out by DiStasi's own (partial) conclusion. He also refers to the bushmen of South Africa who believe that the glance of a menstruating female's eye may fix a man in position and change him into a tree [DiStasi 1981: 83]. Here, there are echoes of the Medusa legend. Interestingly, in Italy the gorgoneum is a common

doorknocker used to ward off the evil eye. DiStasi's conclusion is that the taboos associated with the eye, with the stare, refer to *protection from things which the eye should not see*, "for the eye always and everywhere reduces what is manifold and incomprehensible to what is manageable ... useful and desirable" [*ibid.*: 84].

I translate this directly as a protection from the incomprehensible, unknowable, unviewable, powerful energy force that is 'God', the Source of the sacred.

There is a connection between the female form (in nakedness, particularly) and taboo. Although this can be seen in terms of a masculine-derived and hetero-centric ideology, DiStasi sees something else being at work here too. He sees the naked female form as representing a mystery, as representing "something that lens size notwithstanding, cannot be reduced to externals, to the basic visual elements of light and shadow. It must be something that cannot be looked at from a safe distance for there is none ... that has to do not with only sex and desire but with the very source of those things, of the essential process of which they are but symbols" [DiStasi 1981: 85-86]. Quoting from the mathematician G. Spencer Brown, DiStasi refers to vision and how vision informs us of the world:

"Thus, we cannot escape the fact that the world we know is constructed in order (and thus in such a way to be able) to see itself ... But *in order* to do so, evidently it must first cut itself up into at least one state which sees, and at least one other state which is seen. In this severed and mutilated condition, whatever it sees is only partially itself ... Thus the world, whatever it appears as a physical universe, must always seem to us, its representatives, to be playing a kind of hide-and-seek with itself" [Brown 1969: 105-6, cited by DiStasi 1981: 86].

This would suggest a veil, beneath which is reality. But this reality beneath the veil is too powerful, too all encompassing, too self-consuming for normal vision. The veil is the veil of taboo, the veil which shrouds the oldest mystery, which I propose is the sacred (and not definable) but which for DiStasi signifies the primeval female as the primary deity. He totally supports the Mother Goddess interpretation for the significance of the evil eye and its related imagery. In this, he demonstrates that he has accepted the whole Mother Goddess 'myth'.⁶ I can see a deceptive argument for links between the evil eye concept, the Mother Goddess, sheelas, and Baubo (already mentioned in Chapter One with reference to Margaret Murray in relation to sheelas, and to be discussed further later). Such a connection would imply that

⁶ For more on why this is a 'myth', see Eller [2000].

sheelas are part of a linear universal heritage going back to prehistory, however, which is not something I endorse. Mother Goddess interpretations must be treated with caution, as I discuss in my next section.

The Mother Goddess

Much has been written about the concept of the Mother Goddess in terms of material culture, mythology, and psycho-anthropology [Bachofen 1861 (1973); Frazer 1911-15; Briffault 1927; Neumann 1955; Crawford 1957; James 1959; Gimbutas 1982, 1989; Baring and Cashford 1991, are just a selection of the numerous tomes available on the subject of the Mother Goddess]. It has been, and still remains, both within academic and popular writing and thought, an enormously important and influential concept.

The ‘Goddess Movement’ of recent decades claims that “human society and religion began with the worship of a Goddess in a peace-loving, egalitarian, matriarchal society, and that female divinities everywhere represent survivals of this early mode of religious expression” [Goodison & Morris 1998: 6]. This is clearly a Utopian modern interpretation, which to a degree sentimentalises the past, and shows a lack of understanding of what goddesses may represent, for example, the non-peace-loving, even violent, aspects associated with Kali.

According to Goodison & Morris [1998: 12], the notion of the tripartite goddess (virgin/mother/crone) derives from the Goddess Movement’s interpretation for female divinities. This can be traced back largely to Frazer [1911-15], although Hutton [1997] convincingly suggests that it was Gerhard [1849] who first put forward the idea of a single, prehistoric Great Goddess. The idea of a “primitive matriarchy was first fully expressed in Britain by J.F. MacLellan’s *Primitive marriage* [1875]” [Hutton 1997: 93], with Jane Harrison [1903] (whom I return to in greater detail later) further developing the influential notion of a combination of Great Goddess with primeval matriarchy. The universality of the Great Goddess was given further strength with Neumann’s [1955] presentation of the idea as a Jungian archetype. Three well-known archaeologists who, during the 1950s, supported the notion of the veneration of a single female deity for the Neolithic were Gordon Childe, O.G.S. Crawford, and Glyn Daniel. Despite the ground-breaking work carried out by Ucko [1962, 1968] which critically questioned the interpretation of figurines

as pieces of material culture that represented the single goddess, the popular and to some extent professional academic literature has been, and is still, influenced by the nineteenth- and earlier twentieth-century concept of the Great Goddess. Marija Gimbutas' work has been particularly of significance in refusing to accept the archaeologically- and theoretically-valid criticism of a single universal Mother Goddess concept.

The outcome of this is that, as Goodison & Morris note, much of the Goddess Movement literature reduces the female (as Mother Goddess) to the same essentialist functions that male nineteenth-century scholars proposed in their work which provides the (perhaps unwitting) bed-rock of Goddess literature. Thus, "although these same qualities are now redefined as positive, the Goddess literature still frames its discussion in terms of the male/female polarization which our society imposes" [Goodison & Morris 1998: 14].

The Goddess literature has influenced (as it has other archaeological examples of material culture that are not easy to categorise or find meaning for) interpretations of sheela-na-gigs and placed them within a 'Mother Goddess' context, even though it might not be appropriate. For example, sheelas are sometimes referred to popularly as being the female counterparts to the male Green Man, which is akin to the Frazerian idea of the goddess and her male son-lover consort - Inanna with Dumuzi, Aphrodite with Adonis, Cybele with Attis, Isis with Osiris. The Green Man *may* be a descendant of Dumuzi, Tammuz, and Attis [Baring & Cashford 1991: 411], but that does not make the Sheela a female counterpart to it, particularly when sheelas and Green Men are very *infrequently* found represented on the same building. It is a misinterpretation derived from the influence of the Goddess literature.

We, thus, need to be aware of the Mother Goddess influence, but also able to extricate insightful elements within some of this work, as I now further explore ideas connected with the apotropaic: eyes, the labyrinth and maze-like patterns (sometimes found associated with sheelas as at Ballinderry castle, and Rath Blathmac), sheelas, and the sacred.

Spirals and eyes

There are many examples of spiral and maze-like, or labyrinth, patterns from prehistoric monuments, such as at Newgrange, Co. Meath (where zigzags or chevrons are also found), rock art on a boulder from Ballynahowbeg, near Cahirciveen, Co. Kerry (which is similar to a pair of eyes), and many examples of La Tène art. The famous spirals at the entrance to Newgrange and other passage tombs may be seen in terms of 'guarding'. The spiral labyrinths at Knossos symbolically map the path to death (for at the centre of the labyrinth was the minotaur) and rebirth. DiStasi says that all labyrinths suggest the same idea: "guarding an entrance to a very privileged and dangerous zone" [DiStasi 1981: 104]. The eye which is also a spiral symbolises focus but also its opposite, a whirling confusion of the visual field. Eyes get mistaken as the purveyors of the only reality, says DiStasi [*ibid.*: 107]; whilst eyes and vision are a way to knowledge, they are but one way, and are also barriers to its achievement. For DiStasi, borrowing from Crawford [1957], double spirals represent the eyes of the Mother Goddess. In addition to the Newgrange spirals, DiStasi refers to rock carvings from the passage grave at Knockmany, and the Calderstones passage grave,⁷ near Liverpool, as well as the carving of the goddess from St-Sernin, France, which are all Neolithic.

The double spiral is seen by DiStasi as expressing movement in opposite directions, and that it is a multidimensional image: two dimensional spirals representing the three dimensional vortex. He says: "These spiral eyes of the goddess ... encompass a totality in the same way that their apotropaic function encompasses the totality of existence: they guard both the womb-earth where life begins (as seed), and the womb-tomb where life ends – to begin ... another life; the casket as seed impregnates the tomb as womb to yield the soul. Entry to either of these birthing points is through the labyrinth and possible only under the special conditions expressed by the spiral eyes themselves – a whirling implosive obliteration of all distinction" [1981: 108-9].

⁷ DiStasi's reference for the Calderstones information is incorrect stating it is in Antiquity. The correct citation is *The Antiquaries Journal* for 1945, v. 25: 130, note 1. The note refers to "the Calderstones at Liverpool" which "were set up in their present position early in the nineteenth century. They had previously been enclosed within a cairn nearby ... are of local red sandstone and have spiral cup-and-ring markings." There is no diagram or sketch, and no reference to any other article on the stones.

Thus, a dramatic emphasis on eyes, which many sheelas have, as well as any associated spiral or other patterns (interwoven designs, for example), and an emphasis on the vulva (as a liminal point demarcating symbolic entry to the labyrinth of the sacred / the unknown) can perhaps be seen apotropaically in terms of guarding the viewer from the sacred as well as alerting him or her to it. What I take from DiStasi's ideas is that the Mother Goddess - representing the feminine - may have a part to play in the evil eye complex, but more important is the larger concept of the unknowable sacred realm which permeates ideas of the holy cross-temporally. The feminine symbolises the sacred, with certain imagery directing us towards the sacred by opposing it. Thus, spirals, spiral 'eyes', vulva as entry point to the labyrinth concatenate with danger, are all indications of the protection of, and from, some very great 'thing': the holy, the sacred. The 'danger' associated with sheelas, however, is that they are beyond categorisation as representations of woman, and in this they cannot, therefore, be part of any Mother Goddess hypothesis. The feminine aspect is there, but they go beyond this. They confuse and evade obvious meaning – in much the same way as the labyrinth or spiral.

I want to investigate further now how the spiral and labyrinth might be seen as apotropaic devices.

Gell [1998] discusses the labyrinth and the spiral as part of a process of entrapment or enchantment within his theory of art and agency. Although informed by an anthropological perspective, Gell intended his theory to be applied to all art. He sees art objects as devices “for securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed” [Gell 1992: 43]. This would suggest a social context-oriented and -derived function for art objects, and implies a manipulative rationale for art objects' production. But where Gell differs from functional anthropologists is that he also allows the art object itself to have a value that is all its own, although ultimately derived from the social context in which the object was produced. Thus, an artefact *in its making* becomes endowed with magical prowess; through the action of human production of the object, somehow the object acquires this magical quality. In Gravel's understanding this would be as a result of *mana* contained within the producer of the object, the action which produces the object also has *mana* and, finally, the object as symbol has *mana* too.

If we apply this idea to the production of sheelas, they may similarly have been produced with a knowledge (both by the producers and those who would

subsequently view them or wish to have one on their building) that their making involved them becoming imbued with ‘magical’ qualities. As apotropaic objects this would make sense; it would also allow for later, distorted, ideas interpreting sheelas as witches, although the connection with notions of witchcraft are also linked in with persecutory patriarchal control of women as part of a wider social and political need for a scapegoat [see Chapter Three].

Gell’s work on art and agency contains much that is of relevance to an understanding of sheela-na-gigs and the apotropaic. His intellectual framework is consistent with my own in relation to rejecting linguistic analogies that have been over-used in semiotic and symbolic theories of art. I do not completely endorse his approach because he does not acknowledge the sacred as an extra-human intangible which just ‘is’. Although quite rightly demoting the importance of art as ‘communication’ and ‘meaning’, (although ‘meaning’ does not necessarily imply an automatic linguistic approach) his notion of art is limited by and in its emphasis on being about ‘doing’, which, of course, is agency.

Gell creates a terminology specific to his theory (which seems at odds with his opposition to linguistic analysis), namely that ‘doing’ is agency, and agency is a process involving ‘indexes’ and ‘effects’. Thus, art is created via the mediation of agency by indexes; in other words, the art object is the ‘index’, mediating human action, and provoking inferences, responses or interpretations. Gell further categorises agency in relation to the index by seeing it in a variety of relations to: ‘prototypes’, ‘artists’, and ‘recipients’. Gell’s vocabulary can be less than clear but essentially what he calls the ‘prototype’ is the subject that the index (art object) may represent or stand for, such as an individual depicted in a portrait, although subjects may be ‘represented’ non-mimetically and non-visually. ‘Recipients’ are those whom indices (art objects) are created for, and who may have an effect upon the resultant index; ‘artists’ are those who are considered to be causally responsible for the existence and presentation of the index, but who may in reality actually be vehicles of the agency of others (such as the person who commissions the piece).

Sheelas in this perspective, then, are indices, produced by artists who may be affected by recipients in their production. But Gell, unlike Gravel, would not see sheelas as symbols; his interpretation of the ‘power’ of the image would not be attributed to *mana* although he does ascribe a ‘magical’ quality and efficacy to

indices. But this quality is not a spiritual one; rather the purpose of an art object is its ability to manipulate the recipient or viewer via the intentionality sought or prescribed by agents. Gell does not subscribe to the notion of symbolic meaning; he views art as a “system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it” [Gell 1998: 6].

However, whether as symbols or as ‘instruments’ of action, sheelas are powerful images. In Gell’s theory, sheelas can even be viewed as ‘persons’, for he would probably have viewed them as ‘idols’ or iconic objects which “once appreciated as indexes of agency ... can occupy positions in the network of human social agency ... almost equivalent to the positions of humans themselves” [Nicholas Thomas, Foreword in Gell 1998: x]. I would argue that this is entirely possible with sheelas, because they are all highly individualistic, and as apotropaic entities their individual ‘personalities’ could be even more meaningful to a local audience. Nevertheless, it does not alter any possibility of their also symbolising greater sacred meaning.

Even further to this, it is useful to take Gell’s approach towards art objects generally in which he denounces the concept of ‘art object’ in terms of aesthetics altogether because this is an obstacle to understanding. The concept of ‘aesthetics’ is a western art-appreciation one, and does not necessarily exist, even given different cultural context and understanding of the term, in non-western cultures. Although sheelas are western in context, as archaeological objects they are separated from our interpretations by almost a thousand years, and our aesthetic categories cannot be applied to them. In any case, as with Gell’s material, such objects are not necessarily viewed in a separated sense as an ‘art object’; they are part of a wider contextual matrix, not just a thing of beauty or intrigue to be ‘looked at’ and ‘enjoyed’ in the modern sense; it is not that superficial.

Apotropaic patterns and the labyrinth

As mentioned earlier, Gell’s discussion of ‘decorative’ art assimilates the notion of apotropaic patterns. This is of interest in relation to sheela-na-gigs because a) some sheelas [e.g. Rahara, and Ballinderry castle] have associated patterns which I think are apotropaic [**Plates 14, 15 & 16**], and b) the concept of entrancement which is part of Gell’s understanding of apotropaic patterns is applicable to sheelas and other Romanesque marginal imagery. Wood’s [2001] article presents a useful

examination of geometric patterns found within Romanesque sculpture in England, and states that the proximity of such designs to each other and to figurative sculptural images is significant, although her article makes no suggestion of what this might be. The notion of entrancement and apotropaia will also lead me on to discussing links between sheelas, Baubo, and the medusa.

DiStasi referred to a connection between spirals, eyes and the Mother Goddess, but Gell sees the spiral and other geometric patterns as apotropaic devices in their own right. Much of non-representational art is seen merely in terms of being 'decorative'. For Gell, this 'decoration' is entirely functional; it increases the number of possible relationships that an object can have with humans and other objects, and as such the decoration makes the object come alive in a non-representational way.

Non-representational patterns which are difficult for the mind to make sense of are "cognitively speaking, always 'unfinished business' " [Gell 1998: 80]. For Gell, these patterns are mediators of social agency with actively hostile or defensive intent. Gell sees a strong relationship between decorative art objects and relations of conflict, with much of this art being apotropaic. The apotropaic use of patterns creates in that use a barrier to passage.

I interpret such patterning, therefore, as a liminal zone in itself, as well as signifying a physical threshold. Thus, the pattern and that which it protects, creates a double liminal zone. In this way, perhaps sheelas are liminal zones containing another liminal zone (the vulva). Although sheelas are not patterns, they are difficult for the mind to comprehend – they are 'unfinished business' and therefore perpetually intriguing – and the emphasis on vulva / eye signifies another liminal zone. The presence of associated geometric patterns (and I would include the so-called 'tattoo' marks present on a number of sheelas here) reinforces the concept of liminality.

The way the apotropaic device works, according to Gell, particularly when it is a complicated geometric pattern, such as a maze-like or spiral pattern, is that it entraps demons, thereby rendering them harmless. These devices can be both repellent and protective at the same time, for example, threshold designs known as 'kolam' from Tamilnad, S. India which serve a protective function associated with the cobra deity ('Naga'), and also repel or ensnare demons. These designs are

made by women; they are very 'confusing' patterns which are difficult to make sense of and are akin to mazes. Layard's work [1937] shows a connection between labyrinthine patterns and tattoo designs. The tattoo designs would defend the threshold of the body, as a liminal zone, between inner and outer body.

Gell compares this with the design for the labyrinth at Knossos and the design at the entrance of the passage grave at New Grange. There is a strong link, Gell posits, between maze or labyrinth designs and entry into the underworld. I would interpret this as important because of the liminality of where the labyrinth is placed, between this world and the underworld. A similar design to the Cretan labyrinth is referred to in Book 6 of 'The Aeneid' as being carved on the Cumaeen gates at the entrance to the underworld. Aeneas' men are prevented from going through the gates by the fascination exerted over them by the maze design carved on the doorway.

Kolam-based tattoo designs are also specifically linked with entry into the world of the dead. These were considered a necessity for women and some men, particularly among lower castes, to avoid punishment in the land of the dead. The design is a 'map' of the 'fort' or the city of the land of the dead, and were a means of assisting the dead person to find their way to the land of the dead after death and be safely reunited with other dead kin. Gell states that whilst the design is a map it is also a puzzle, because the belief is that the god of death (Yama) and his demons will eat the untattooed but will not harm the tattooed woman because they cannot solve the puzzle of the tattoo. Thus, both kolam and labyrinth or maze design work as apotropaic devices by drawing unwanted (demonic) attention into the pattern, being entrapped or enchanted by it, and are thereby rebuffed from their goal (entry into the person or building) and rendered impotent.

The Evil Eye and Apotropaia

Thus apotropaia is not the same concept as the evil eye. But it has become confused with it, and is related to it. The evil eye is a force sent out from a person, even without their knowledge, as a result of envy or praise, producing negative, dire, or even fatal results. Apotropaia is a protective or defensive device which can offset the possibility of evil eye influence, but it can also be more than this.

With regard to sheelas, in my opinion, the evil eye and apotropaic aspects are that sheelas deflect any evil eye influences by not attracting envious reactions in viewers; further, they dispel such possible glances by the exposure and design of

their eye / vulva because of the connection between these two parts of the body symbolically. Sheelas represent the sacred and may be seen as apotropaic, but this is not only to do with deflecting harmful approaches, whether in human or spirit-form; they also protect the onlooker from attempting to view the sacred, that which cannot be viewed without harming the onlooker. Thus, an apotropaic device need not only protect the thing (building, person, object) it is on. It can also be there to protect humans, in their predisposition to seeking all knowledge, from exposure to that which can never be known or seen.

With this in mind, I can now move on to discussing the linked ideas of Medusa and Baubo, both of which may be viewed as apotropaic devices, and to investigate whether there is any intellectual tradition connecting them and sheelas. Might the Medusa myth, somehow, have influenced those who produced the sheelas, and/or has it influenced later interpretations of sheelas?

Medusa and Baubo

What is my research rationale for looking at Medusa and Baubo? Baubo, as myth and as figurine, does have some relationship with sheela-na-gigs, in the exposing of the vulva and the laughter associated with this (and the further links with carnivalesque and the grotesque as discussed in Chapter Three). What links Baubo with Medusa is that they are both apotropaic devices associated with protection of and from the sacred. Medusa as the Gorgon is both terrifying as image and concept - a monster - and I suggest that sheelas may operate in a similar way. Thus - whilst not as a direct influence, but more subtly (for example, perhaps as cultural absorption on several levels [oral, visual, ritual, etc.] and later redefinition) - there may be a widespread understanding of the sacred represented in different forms which Medusa, Baubo and sheelas are part of. Thus, we are not dealing with a Mother Goddess / primal female deity notion, or seeking an originating precursor for such a notion. Rather, I am trying to grapple with this much bigger concept that is the sacred.

Garber & Vickers [2003: 2] inform us that Medusa was the beautiful and only mortal one of the three Gorgons of Greek myth, who were all sisters. Medusa was either raped by, or, in other versions of the story, had some sexual liaison with, the sea-god Poseidon in the temple of Athena. To punish her, Athena transformed

Medusa from woman to monster, changing her hair into a mass of snakes, and anyone who henceforth looked at her would be turned into stone. Perseus was given the task of slaying the medusa, and instead of looking directly at her, he used the reflection of her in his shield to guide his hand to strike off her head. Perseus then used Medusa's head in battle to petrify his opponents.

However, the symbolism of the snakes and Medusa have a greater antiquity than ancient Greece, according to Baring and Cashford [1991], for originally Medusa was one of the many granddaughters of Gaia, the goddess Earth, and "in Sumerian myth Nammu, the great serpent goddess of the abyss, gives birth to earth and heaven" [*ibid.*: 64]. Thus, the link between the serpent and a female mythical being is at least Sumerian if not older. The earliest concept of the Medusa myth actually connects her with the horse rather than snakes [see Baring & Cashford 1991: 341] as shown in a seventh century BC representation from Boeotia, Greece, where she has the body of a horse and the head and torso of the gorgon, with her head being slain by Perseus. By the mid-sixth century BC Medusa has gained her snakes and lost her half-horse body.

Jane Harrison

My next section refers to the work of Jane Harrison, who clearly was very influential in the early development of the Goddess Movement (as aforementioned, p. 131), and on interpretations of myth and ritual within a classical context, including the Medusa myth. An understanding of Harrison also provides an insight into how archaeology, art history, myth and ritual were perceived within academia during the latter part of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries. This has some bearing, I think, on how sheelas have been viewed. I see Harrison's work, unlike some of Margaret Murray's work, as academically sound. The next section of my thesis goes into some detail in order to demonstrate this.

Mary Beard [2000] presents Harrison as an individualist who was a thorough and dedicated researcher and academic, and who has been undeservedly out of favour recently with the academic community. It is something that Harrison experienced when she was alive, too. Harrison's public lectures have been criticised for being melodramatic, even "embarrassingly flamboyant" [Beard 2000: 57], with "vulgar sensationalism of her delivery ... [employing] ... (audiovisual) tricks ... noisy props

... the dark lighting, the power dressing, the specially high-pitched voice ... ” [Beard 2000: 58], but nonetheless with “mindblowing” [*ibid.*] magic lantern slides, which had been meticulously handmade by Harrison’s friends and pupils. In contrast to the public lectures, another side of Harrison emerges through the collection of notes, exercises and syllabuses stored in the Newnham College Archive which reveal her teaching methods during the late 1880s into the 1890s. Through these it is clear that she is interested in much more than art ‘appreciation’, setting out “a programme for the scientific study of myth-and-art, art as myth, myth as art” [Beard 2000: 102].

Although the link in Harrison’s teaching between art history and the study of myth and religion is not quite “so novel as has often been imagined” - the new classical archaeology papers in Cambridge also made a similar link from 1879 onwards - Beard suggests that Harrison’s teaching methods were “revolutionary” [*ibid.*], and thus could be argued to be ahead of their time. These involved teaching by personal examination of the objects, focusing on interpretation, method, and argument. Through the survival of exercises that Harrison gave out to her pupils, notably some photographic tests and Harrison’s remarks on the answers given, it is clear that “what underlies these exercises is the idea that visual imagery is embedded in the cultural and religious history of the ancient world; that ‘art’ is inseparable from the semiotics of ancient culture in its widest sense, and that there were skills of visual interpretation to be learned” [Beard 2000: 104]. Thus, Harrison approached her material in terms of contextualising it.

Harrison as ‘Ritualist’

“Harrison has been conscripted into ‘the story of Ritualism’ as figurehead and focus of a Cambridge movement in the history of religion ... [which] ... has left little place either for ... [her] ... period as an art historian or for following the work of that early [London] period through into her later ‘Ritualist’ classics, *Prolegomena* and *Themis*” [Beard 2000: 106].

Beard says that “one of the things this Ritualist story has occluded is the fact that Harrison never ceased to be a historian of images ... constantly interrogating the visual remains of the ancient religious world, always at work as an iconographer, an interpreter of what she could see” [*ibid.*]. The basis for her interpretations, therefore, is visual evidence, using analysis and comparison. Beard says it does not

matter that Harrison's conclusions are unbelievable, or that some of her conclusions went down badly with reviewers and were seen as "flights of fancy" [Beard 2000: 107], because the important point is the *method*, "the emphasis on visuality and on inferences drawn from the juxtaposition of significant (visual) parallels" [*ibid.*]. Indeed, with the close links between archaeology and the history of religion in the late nineteenth century iconographic study had to be an important aspect of analysing myth.

The Cambridge 'Ritualists'

Beard highlights that in "almost all recent writing Harrison's intellectual career has been understood in terms of her relationship with this particular 'movement'" [Beard 2000: 109]. Beard asks challenging questions related to the existence of this supposed group.

One of the main aspects of Harrison's work was the primacy of ritual in her interpretation of Greek myth and religion, indeed, that ritual practice gave rise to myth. Such a claim, says Beard, was echoed and supported "by a number of other classicists and archaeologists, mostly working in Cambridge and many of them good friends of hers [Harrison's] (and of each other)" [*ibid.*: 111]. Gilbert Murray, Francis Cornford (who became Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy at Cambridge from 1931-1939), James Frazer, and A.B. Cook are among these. Beard says there is no doubt that these writers knew each other, and also made reference to each other's work (acknowledgements in their own work revealing this). However, it is also clear that these writers were very different from each other. Beard puts forward that in actual fact no such group as the Cambridge 'Ritualists' ever existed, that there was no shared, single intellectual viewpoint between these people. The label attached to them is a more recent creation, which Beard says became evident from "at least ... the 1960s ... [when historians of classical scholarship] have liked to give them a capital *R* and to make them a bona fide club, with members paid up and card-carrying: the 'Ritualists'" [*ibid.*: 113]. Harrison, Murray, and Cornford tend to be the individuals seen as core 'members', with Frazer, Cook, and A.W. Verrall associated with the 'movement'.⁸

However, Beard disagrees with the view put forward by Ackerman [1991(a)] and others that there ever was such a group [Beard 2000: 114]. They never called

⁸ See Ackerman [1991a] and Arlen [1990] for more about the 'members' of the group.

themselves or thought of themselves as ‘The Cambridge Ritualists’. This does not negate their contributions to academia being seen subsequently as part of some sort of ‘movement’. However, what Beard does find fault with is, where once the modern category (in this instance ‘Ritualists’) has been devised, *how* that category is “put to work once invented, and particularly with the constant slide in most modern discussions from Ritualism *as an intellectual process* (as *ideas* – in the air, debated over tea and dinner, reargued, refuted, and refined) to Ritualists *as a group of individuals* with a shared intellectual program and a common manifesto” [Beard 2000: 114-5].

Nonetheless, “real or not, the Ritualist movement has come to provide the context for assessing the importance of Jane Harrison and the development of her writing” [Beard 2000: 118]. What is interesting is that Harrison is “made to ‘stand at the heart of the group (in more than one sense),’ and it is through her, and her relationships and entanglements with the others, that modern critics articulate the structure of the group as a Group” [Beard 2000: 118-9, citing Ackerman 1991(a): 2]. Ackerman restates this again in saying “‘Gilbert Murray was (and is) clearly the best known ... nevertheless I maintain that Jane Harrison was the center of the group’” [Beard 2000: 205, note 34, citing Ackerman 1991(b): 8].

Harrison’s transition to becoming a ‘ritualist’ is often seen as demarcated by the ‘D.S. MacColl incident’,⁹ in which MacColl wrote Harrison a letter in early 1887 “sharply criticizing her flamboyant lecturing style” [Beard 2000: 119]. This letter also contained other criticisms “aimed at Harrison’s whole approach to the history of art” [*ibid.*]. Prior to this letter, Harrison “had been committed to an ‘aesthetic’ approach to the visual arts, to Platonic Ideality and to an admiration for the classical perfection of the age of Pheidias. Then came a complete academic change of direction, as she turned increasingly, under his [MacColl’s] influence, to the origins of Greek culture and to the study of folklore, religion, anthropology, and ritual” [Beard 2000: 119-20].

Beard questions whether Harrison had such a dramatic academic change in focus, and certainly it was not as a result of one intervention. In actual fact, Harrison’s very first book (*Myths of the Odyssey in art and literature*, London, 1882)

⁹ MacColl “was an outspoken and influential art critic ... [becoming] ... (between 1906 and 1911) Keeper of the Tate Gallery ...” [Beard 2000: 57]. He was friend, colleague, holiday companion, and coauthor of Harrison.

demonstrates elements of her interest in mythology and ritual, says Beard [2000: 121]. In addition, “the book she coauthored with MacColl in 1894, *Greek vase paintings*, is the most explicitly *aesthetic* book she ever wrote” [Beard 2000: 122], thus demonstrating that the MacColl influence cannot have been as extreme as suggested.

The emphasis on Ritualism also disallows other contexts for Harrison’s work, such as the Durkheimian influence (i.e. her growing commitment to sociological and social theories of religion), and her place in the wider context of the University itself as an academic institution. Ritualism has, too, to be set within this broader context. Beard, interestingly, highlights the link between Ritualism and “the new subject of archaeology as it was taught in Cambridge from the early 1880s to just after the Great War (when Harrison left Newnham for Paris)” [Beard 2000: 125].

Thus, the prominence given to Harrison’s shift in academic emphasis from art history and archaeology to folklore and the history of religion ignores the content and emphasis of the academic study of archaeology at that time. Indeed, Beard says the Cambridge Classical Tripos was radically reformed in 1879, and for the first time classical archaeology was offered as a major component of their degree [Beard 2000: 125]. This course says Beard “looks strikingly different from what we would define as classical archaeology, [but] ... is very close indeed to almost all the interests of Jane Harrison” [Beard 2000: 125-6]. By 1888, one of the five papers was entitled ‘Mythology and Ritual’, and by 1890 this had become ‘Myth, Ritual and Religion’.

The main point Beard is making here is that “Harrison’s supposed conversion from art history to the history of religion ... does not make sense in the context of late nineteenth-century subject definitions – which (at least in Cambridge) saw religion, mythology, art, and antiquities as constituent parts of the same subdiscipline, classical archaeology” [Beard 2000: 127]. “Cambridge classical teaching was already explicitly putting myth and ritual *side by side* in 1888; it was not a big step to suggest that ritual came *before* myth” [Beard 2000: 127]. Thus, in effect the apparatus of the classical tripos at Cambridge had as much to do with creating Ritualism as an idea “as much as any dangerous feminism on Harrison’s part “ [ibid.].

“When Harrison returned to Cambridge from London in 1898, it was the

archaeological option ... of the [classical] Triplos that she taught” [Beard 2000: 128]. When she left for London in 1880 (she had finished at Newnham in 1879), she would have been aware of the debates concerning the new range of subjects that were to be taught, and about what was to ‘count’ as archaeology. Charles Newton’s essay, first delivered as a lecture in Oxford in 1850 and published in 1880, influenced the course of how archaeology was seen and taught as an academic discipline, and Harrison must have been aware of this too. Newton proposed that archaeology should encompass the study of culture in its broadest sense.¹⁰ Newton, Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the British Museum and distinguished scholar, was also Harrison’s mentor whilst she was at the British Museum, studying Greek art and archaeology under his direction from 1880.¹¹ Harrison lectured and lead tours at the British Museum as well as studying there. Beard concludes that Harrison should be seen as an archaeologist rather than as a Ritualist, for this “captures the historical specificity of her work so much better” [Beard 2000: 128]. Peacock gives us an insight into the difficulties Harrison may have encountered as a woman scholar in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academia, for “the great contradiction of Jane’s life ... was that she combined an intense desire to succeed in a male field with an insistence on using a distinctly female voice” [Peacock 1988: 59].

Having, I hope, established Harrison’s credibility as an academic, I now turn to her understanding of the Gorgon, which relates to my ideas about sheelas and apotropaia.

The Gorgoneion

The Gorgoneion is the actual mask of the gorgon. The Gorgon, as Being, is discussed by Harrison [1922] as a form of the *keres*, who were perceived as ‘ghosts’, ‘spirits of the dead’, although the concept is both wider and vaguer than this. The *keres* were the central aspect of the ancient Greek Anthesteria festival held in the spring. This three-day festival was in honour of Dionysos with the placation of the *keres* being the main emphasis, the object being the promotion of fertility by the purgation of evil influences. The concept of apotropaia is evident here.

¹⁰ Newton, C.T. 1880. ‘On the study of archaeology’, in Newton, C.T. (ed.), *Essays on art and archaeology*. London: [?], pp.1-38.

¹¹ More detailed biographical information about this period of Harrison’s life is to be found in Peacock [1988].

Dionysos was also Lord of Souls and therefore had his chthonic aspect. On the third day of the festival a sacrifice of grain and seeds was made to appease Hermes Chthonios, Hermes of the Underworld. The grain and seeds (strong links with Demeter here, and, therefore, Baubo) were seen as dead men's food and therefore were not partaken of by the festival-goers (although Burkert [1985: 240] says that it was only the priests who were barred from eating this food).

The interconnectedness of some key ideas presented in my thesis is apparent in the above paragraph: we have Dionysos (perpetually liminal and links with Pseudo-Dionysius and negative theology); Hermes Chthonios (who is also Mercurius; DiStasi [1981: 46; 89] connects Mercurius with the evil eye because Hermes' nature is oil and water, both used as part of the ritual for diagnosis of the evil eye; Jung [1969: 82] refers to Hermes/Mercurius as representing the soul. This idea links in with medieval perceptions of soul, as the alchemists saw Hermes' nature (of oil and water) uniting matter and spirit. Hermes/Mercurius is also a liminal character, constantly changing, not of a fixed state); Demeter (and therefore Baubo); the gorgon; and apotropaia. In this section, I shall draw a clearer picture, I hope, of these and further connections, and ultimately, their manifestation in or influence on the sheela-na-gig concept.

The third day of the Anthesteria festival – the Chytroi – has been viewed as the day associated with ghosts, and the first two days with drinking. However, the Choes (second day) was also seen as an unlucky day for which apotropaic precautions had to be taken. It was seen as a day of pollution because of the rising up of the spirits of the dead ready for the third day. Buckthorn was chewed and doors were anointed with pitch as apotropaic means. The buckthorn is a plant with purgative properties, and was used as a prophylactic to “repel the evil arts of magicians” by the ancients [Harrison 1922: 40, referring to Dioscorides' *Materia medica*].

The keres are often represented as little winged figures, being the souls of the dead leaving the grave or the body of the deceased. Sometimes a 'magician' may be depicted dispelling or revoking the keres. Such an image is shown on a vase painting from a lekythos in the University Museum of Jena [Harrison 1922: 43]. This representation features a large grave jar from which two keres have escaped, a third is emerging, and a fourth is diving back into the jar. Also shown is Hermes Psychopompos, with his *rhabdōs* (simple rod or twig - an 'enchanter's wand') in hand. In his other hand he holds a *kerykeion* (herald's staff or king's sceptre held by

the herald). However, it is the *rhabdos* which is the implement of agency. Harrison also refers to the myth of Circe, who similarly used a *rhabdos* to change Odysseus' friends into swine; and the *rhabdos* of Hermes also led ghosts of the slain suitors to Hades. Thus, says Harrison, the magic wand is the attribute of all who control the dead: "it is the wand not the sceptre that is the token of life and death" [Harrison 1922: 45].

This understanding of the *rhabdos* makes me wonder whether there is any connection between it and the sheelas who hold 'staff-like' objects at Romsey, Stanton St Quintin, and Clomantagh. The Romsey sheela in particular is referred to as holding a staff (indeed, an Abbess's staff). The significance of the *rhabdos* in a possible connection with sheelas is further strengthened by Harrison's statement that "it is the *rhabdos* [which] was carried in apotropaic ceremonies ... " [Harrison 1922: 46]. If we accept that sheelas are or were apotropaic symbols or devices, the link with another symbol or implement which was also apotropaic would seem plausible. The *rhabdos* is not always depicted as a simple rod; it can be forked like a divining rod, with the forks shown in a variety of shapes. A snake, symbol of the Underworld, would also sometimes be shown curled around the *rhabdos*. Ultimately, says Harrison, the twisted ends of the *rhabdos* became decorative snakes. We can see this also represented in the continued use of the symbol for the medical profession, the caduceus, linked with Hermes, and healing, or the 'banishing of ill health'.

Harrison subdivides the *ker* into different categories¹²: ghost and sprite; bacilli (germs); evil sprite; old age and death. The meanings of all *keres* became narrowed down to one: death and the fate of death. So, the *ker* is not death itself, but the 'angel of death' or the 'spirit' of death. This is important to know when one looks at the other categories of *ker* which Harrison points to, which I will elucidate here as being of particular interest to my understanding of sheela-na-gigs.

The *ker* as harpy and wind demon

In Homer, the *keres* are mainly death-spirits, but they also carry souls to Hades. The harpies are the snatchers, winged women demons. The gorgon and the harpy

¹² Vernant [1991, and in Garber & Vickers 2003: 214] rejects Harrison's grouping of gorgons, harpies, and erinyes as different types of *ker*, for he feels each has a significant and particular place in the system of divine Powers, and that Harrison's category of '*keres*' is too vague. However, for my purposes, it is the connection between the different types which is of interest.

are closely linked concepts. Harrison refers to a vase in the Berlin museum [Harrison 1922: 177] which shows the image of a gorgon with a gorgon's head and protruding tongue but with a winged body and snatching two souls in harpy-like fashion. The bird-woman also links with the Siren concept, a malign but seductive creature in Homer, becoming later softened into the sorrowful death angel. Harpies, however, not only snatch away souls to death (reminiscences of the banshee again), but they also give life, bringing things to birth. For example, a harpy was the mother (by Zephyros) of the horses of Achilles – both parents being in a sense winds – but the harpy wind is somewhere between woman and horse. The connection between gorgon and harpy is again made with a C7th BC representation on a Boeotian vase [Harrison 1922: 179; Garber & Vickers 2003: Fig. 2] in the Louvre, of Medusa (being slain by Perseus) as a harpy-like half-horse, half-gorgon woman. Harrison sees strong links between Gorgo, Empusa, Lamia, Sphinx, Siren, and Harpy. These are the darkest of the keres, the 'blue-black' keres (the ancient traditional colour of the Underworld), those most dread-fully associated with the Underworld.

The ker as Gorgon

Although the three gorgons were sisters (Sthenno, Euryale, and Medusa), it was only Medusa who was mortal, Medusa about whom the myth is associated. Harrison sees the basis of the Gorgoneion (the essential features of which are head with snakes for hair, glaring eyes, protruding tusks from the mouth, and a pendent tongue) as a ritual object, a "ritual mask misunderstood" [Harrison 1922: 187] - misunderstood because this ritual mask can be used beneficently or malignantly. I interpret this as a clear understanding of the nature of apotropaia which, as I have earlier explained, is not only concerned with deflecting 'evil' away but is also about providing protection from being exposed to the sacred.

Rainer Mack [2002] points out the paradox of the medusa image, an image which has been produced presumably to be looked at, yet the mythology, the fiction that supports the image, makes it unviewable. It is "the representation of the non-visible" [Mack 2002: 574, citing Frontisi-Ducroux 1995: 69]. The non-negotiability of the viewing of the medusa makes it quite different from other ancient Greek affective images such as effigies, doubles, or cult statues, says Mack. And yet the image was extremely common. For my own interpretation, I do not have a problem with the image deriving from, or having attached to it subsequently, a myth of non-viewability, and the ubiquitous placing of such an image on common material

culture items. This simply suggests to me the power of it as an apotropaic image. It is not an image you have a relationship with as a viewer; rather it serves as a reminder of the power of the sacred or divine which exists beyond our human visibility, and in this way it protects. The sense of the double is manifest in this notion, where protection is given of the object the image is found on and of the viewer from viewing the unviewable. The medusa myth necessarily involves reflection of the image (in the 'mirror' of Perseus' shield) and thus the double. But it is also very much about the hidden, the obscured, that which is behind the gorgoneion, the mask.

However, it is the eye wherein resides the power: Aeschylus says of the Gorgons that they slay by a malign effluence which comes from their eyes [Harrison 1922: 195]. Thus, the Gorgon was seen as a sort of incarnate Evil Eye says Harrison: the monster may have been "tricked out with cruel tusks and snakes, but it slew by the eye, it *fascinated*" [Harrison 1922: 196].

For Harrison, then, the Gorgon is not human enough to be a ghost but also lacks the gentler side of the keres. As an art form the Gorgoneion figures greatly, and lent some of its traits to the Erinyes, notably the "deathly distillation from which they slay 'from out their eyes they ooze a loathly rheum'" [Harrison 1922: 197, citing Aeschylus].

The Ker as Erinyes

The gorgon is the most savage and monstrous of all the ker forms [Harrison 1922: 197]. But, the ker as erinyes connects the idea of the gorgon and the harpy with that of the banshee,¹³ and thereby, I suggest, a connection with sheela-na-gigs. Somehow notions of apotropaia and these ancient mythic representations of terrifying death-related women have become attached, via a 'memory' which I suggest is stored visually and non-linguistically, to the images now called sheela-na-gigs.¹⁴

The erinyes is an avenging spirit, and is quite distinct from the idea of the ker because erinyes derives from a strongly felt human emotion. Thus, the erinyes is the ker of a human being unrighteously slain; it is not death; rather, it is the outraged

¹³ See: Lysaght [1986] for an in-depth study of the banshee seen from within a folkloric perspective.

¹⁴ For more on possible resonances of the past manifested in material culture see various papers in Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf [1999].

soul of the dead person screaming for vengeance. It is, says Harrison, the vengeful and angry aspects of the erinys which mark it out as different from all other keres.

The gorgon, harpy, and erinys are all closely related. The gorgon is differentiated by her mask-face; the harpy is a less monstrous form of gorgon; and the erinys is angry avenger. Harpies are depicted with wings, which the gorgon and erinys sometimes also manifest. Snakes are often represented with these images. Harrison suggests that the erinys is originally a snake concept – the (human) ghost as snake. Snakes can be found shown on grave mounds as depicted in ancient Greek vase-paintings [Harrison 1922: 328]. The soul of the dead man is shown as a snake. Snake and Earth are also related ideas, and thus, earth as Mother. So there is a strong feminine aspect to the ancient (pre-Christian and pre-Semitic) concept of snake. Earth also has its chthonic attributes – Underworld, and underground. Death- and snake-related, Gorgon and erinys are indisputably inter-connected. And so too is Baubo.

Baubo

I have already mentioned Baubo in chapter two when discussing the contribution Margaret Murray has made to sheela-na-gig studies. Vernant [1991, excerpted in Garber and Vickers 2003: 210-231] brings together the concepts of Medusa / Gorgo and Baubo within the notion of alterity in terms of the ‘other’ of the ‘person’, not just ‘another’ person, but what Vernant calls ‘extreme alterity’ in ancient Greece. In their frontality and monstrosity, representations of the gorgon are, too, akin to those of sheela-na-gigs. We never see sheelas in profile, nor images of the gorgon.

Vernant’s overlapping of the Gorgon with Baubo involves his understanding of the “play between the face of Gorgo and the image of the female sexual organ” [Garber & Vickers 2003: 212]. He sees this in terms of disturbing but also humorous monstrosity, similar to the *phallos* of the representations of Satyrs and Silenoi: an interplay between grotesque hilarity and terror. We are back in the zone of teratology.

Vernant places Baubo within a double category: she is a night-spectre and “related, like Gorgo, Mormo, or Empusa, to infernal Hekate” [*ibid.*], but she is also able to

induce laughter, with “cheerful jokes and vulgar gestures” [*ibid.*], in Demeter. Vernant says what Baubo actually displays to Demeter is her genitals made to look like a face, “a face in the form of genitals; one might even say the genitals made into a mask” [*ibid.*: 213]. Another name for the *phallos* is *baubon*¹⁵ which, Vernant says, demonstrates that Baubo acquires “a symmetrical function at the opposite pole of the monstrous” [*ibid.*]. As well as suggesting a strong binary dualism, and, as Olender points out [in Halperin *et al* 1990: 103], “since male and female roles are not equivalent in the Greek world, the meaning of obscene words and gestures on the part of either sex cannot be expected to line up symmetrically”, Vernant’s understanding of the sacred aspect of this gesture is not entirely evident. He is partly aware of it, however, for he refers to the effect of the *phallos* as one of producing sacred dread, or terrified fascination, in some female on-lookers. We thus have a reference to the apotropaic nature of such exposure, but not a deeper understanding of the reverence for the sacredness of the female genitalia and its symbolism. If we accept that *baubon* actually means dildo, then we have a stronger case, perhaps, for emphasis on female associations (although we should not exclude male use either). However, given that the Baubo myth is linked with the female-only Demeter cult festivals [see Burkert 1985: 242], and the term *baubon* means dildo, it is likely to be a female emphasis on usage, rather than male.

Margaret Murray did not do justice to her inclusion of the Baubo myth when she discussed it in relation to sheela-na-gigs. She mainly refers to the images of Baubo to support exposure of the female genitals [see pp. 46-47, this thesis], and a possible link between the use of Baubo within a ritual context and sheela-na-gigs (in the form of female homosexuality) also being employed in some sort of ritual act. Murray does not dwell upon any deeper significance of the myth of Baubo, and related contextual elements. But, as with many of her more radical notions, she does alert us to a relationship that might be significant (i.e. Baubo with sheela-na-gigs), but without further supporting evidence. My various discussions of Baubo within this thesis aim to do this.

Murray’s version of Baubo, found within her 1934 article, does not appear to be the same as that referred to in later works, such as Olender [1985], and reproduced in translated and abbreviated form in Halperin *et al* [1990: 83-113]. Murray’s two

¹⁵ Olender [in Halperin *et al*, 1990: 84] states that *baubon* actually means false phallos, or dildo. This is derived from Herodas [*Mimes*, 6.19] in which two women who are close friends refer to such a *baubon* as a leather phallos.

visual examples are not at all the same form of Baubo as that displayed in Olender's work. The two images of Baubo that Murray shows us [1934: figs. 17 & 18] have complete bodies (apart from damage), are squatting, appear to have sheela-like hand gestures towards the vulva area, and clearly have breasts. They also have hair or head-dresses, and are not like sheelas at all, other than that they are exposing and drawing attention to their genitals. The images of Baubo in Olender are images of women reduced to legs and head where genitalia should be.

One might assume that Murray has used the type she calls Baubo to support her theory, rather than utilise the full material which was available, as the 'Olender' Baubos were discovered in 1898 (at Priene, Asia Minor, in the remains of a temple of Demeter and Kore dating to *circa* fourth century BC), and Murray must have known about them by 1934.

The Baubo images I refer to are the Olender ones. They are small (8-15cm in height) terracotta statuettes, seven representations of beings composed of legs (straight, together, and standing) with a face just above the vaginal opening, and elaborate hair arrangements with top-knots. One of the images clearly shows the exposing aspect of the myth with skirt being held open either side of the 'face'. These images recall the myth of the priestess at Delphi and her ventriloquial genitalia [see p. 174, this thesis]. Despite this being a false myth, the Baubo image reinforces the significant element of the ventriloquial aspect: the relationship of mouth and vulva.

Baubo was a nurse or servant to the grain goddess Demeter. Demeter is in mourning for the loss of her daughter Persephone / Kore, and Baubo manages to make her laugh, rousing her from her mourning. There are two mythic versions of the story, where the earliest refers to Baubo as *lambe* found within the Homeric 'Hymn to Demeter' – not written by Homer at all and dating from the seventh century BC. *lambe* (linked to the *iamb* of derisive poetry, obscene insults, scatological humour) uses a verbal, obscene joke (we have no record of what this might have been). Later, as Baubo, the myth recalls her obscene gesture which makes Demeter laugh.

Certainly she is referred to as Baubo by the fifth century BC as she is mentioned (only once) in the work of the Greek philosopher Empedocles. Hesychius¹⁶ claimed

¹⁶ See Lubell [1994: 4]

that the name Baubo as used by Empedocles equated with the noun *koilia* which means womb, or vulva.

Lubell [1994] sees a broader interpretation of lambe / Baubo related to the emphasis on the vulva and the sacred aspect associated with her because of it. It may be that Murray was also leaning towards such an interpretation, but did not express it clearly or with sufficient supporting research material. Lubell identifies a 'spirit of Baubo' which is manifested in the Medusa, mermaids, and sheelas, as well as the 'Venus' figurines of the Upper Palaeolithic. But Lubell does not merely resort to utilising a 'fertility goddess' understanding for Baubo. She sees terms such as 'Venus' (which for Lubell presumes a masculine-dictated kind of sexual identity) or 'fertility goddess' as too simplistic, "reducing the significance of the body to cliché" [Lubell 1994: xvii]. The significance of the Baubo myth for Lubell is that it represents a myth of female power, and her icon is the vulva, both irreverent and sacred. One of the interesting points Lubell makes is that Baubo resists a single identity; she is elusive. Although the concept of fertility is involved, it is not enough on its own as a rationale for her existence. In keeping with my own approach to sheelas, Lubell similarly sees the spirit of Baubo as valid cross-culturally and cross-temporally. However, unlike my understanding of sheelas, she identifies the lambe / Baubo image as a "single manifestation of a recurring symbol of female sexual energy" [*ibid.*: 8].

As a mythology is an ambiguous construct, the obfuscation of understanding of meaning is inevitable, for there are various meanings and various levels of meanings; this is similar for the evil eye, Baubo, sheelas, and mystical theology. The idea which links these concepts is to do with notions of not being able to see, or of being *prevented* from seeing: some things are so part of the sacred they cannot be seen. Thus, the evil eye has something to do with protecting the sacred from being 'seen'.

Baubo clearly has a place in the complexity of influences or 'memories' that contribute to the images we call sheela-na-gigs. Sexuality, or sexual energy, plays a part but, perhaps, only a small one, and maybe not one at all. In eastern understandings of human energy the type corresponding to 'sexual' energy is the kundalini, represented as a snake. As put forward earlier in this chapter, the snake in its pre-Christian, pre-Semitic manifestations symbolised the female and fertility but as a sacred force, with chthonic and apophatic resonances, rather than being

seen as a symbol of temptation, demonised, stripped of its deeper meaning and worth, and used to reinforce negative imagery surrounding the female.¹⁷

The snake has suffered inversion of meaning. In my opinion, sheelas have suffered a similar fate. The sacredness has been lost, particularly by the (non-Irish) post-medieval Christianised community, but has more recently been re-appropriated by less orthodox belief systems.

Summary

This chapter has presented a complex set of ideas, which are intended to contextualise sheelas within the sacred, which is highly problematical as the sacred is an ambiguous realm. However, I have argued that sheelas are part of this realm. They are liminal entities, part of the grotesque - as concept and as body – linking with ideas about the carnivalesque and medieval popular culture. Sheelas are part of the monstrous and the transgressive, as, it can be argued, woman is viewed as transgressive and monstrous. In discussing the idea of the ‘sacred’, I have put forward my understanding of negative theology and its relevance to the importance of the chthonic for accessing the sacred. I discussed the Delphic oracle myth in relation to liminal body parts and ventriloquism, and I suggested the use of the female body as a sacred liminal site. Sheelas may represent a ‘memory’ of this sacredness that was acknowledged in classical times.

Continuing with body parts, I discussed the eye, and in particular the concept of the evil eye and apotropaia which is always seen as connected with sheela-na-gigs in the literature. I have discussed the development of the concept of the Mother Goddess and the influence it has had on the Goddess Movement, and subsequently sheela-na-gig interpretation. I have argued for connections between designs of spirals, eyes, labyrinths, and mazes as apotropaic devices, and have presented Gell’s [1998] work in relation to apotropaia and the notion of entrancement and entrapment. As a final strand in the links between apotropaia and sheela-na-gigs, I have drawn attention to the medusa myth and the story of Baubo also from classical mythology.

¹⁷ For more on the later medieval and Renaissance associations and depictions of the snake see Kelly [1971].

The conclusion of this chapter is that sheelas are part of the sacred. They alert us to that which cannot be seen, and hide a complexity of meaning which cannot be accessed by the limited view that they are fertility symbols, images of lust, or were intended to scare off the devil. Their interpretation has been further distorted by the impact of the Goddess Movement, which has removed sheelas even more from the medieval Christian concept of negative theology of which they are undoubtedly a part.

CONCLUSION

Post-Medieval Responses to Sheelas and Some Conclusions

“Sheela-na-gigs are stone hags showing their slits ...
She displays today the strength of the Celtic female ...
She exists outside of relations to men and children ...
unable to turn into a stereotype ... The undefinable terror
twat will destroy all time restrictions.”

[Bone 1998]

We have, in effect, come full circle to where I began this thesis. I write as a post-medieval observer, researcher, and modern visual consumer of the images called sheela-na-gigs. Other post-medieval responses to sheelas are recorded in the material evidence itself, iconoclastically; in the eighteenth and nineteenth century antiquarian noting and discussion of them; in the continued twentieth century interest in them as an academic marginal subject of study; and in more recent non-academic writings where the sheela may be seen as an icon for New Age spirituality and Neo-paganism, and/or as a symbol of resistance to patriarchy and the establishment (see, for example, Bone [1998] who sees sheelas in a highly powerful way).

I would like to briefly discuss some of these responses because, again, they are part of the context within which sheelas as material culture objects exist. Sheelas are a good example of how the meaning of material culture objects can alter over time. They are particularly interesting because they still have meaning now, albeit, perhaps, in a different way from their original meaning. Reaction to imagery is in itself, if manifested physically so that it is visible, of archaeological interest.

Iconoclasm and the obscene

Andersen refers to the defacement of sheelas [Andersen 1977: 27] resulting from their probably causing offence. He attributes such an attitude as being representative of Victorian prudery, but could sheelas have caused affront earlier than this, and if so how much earlier?

Camille [1998a] actually sees effacement as an act of representation, “an embodied response” [Camille 1998a: 140]. Referring specifically to medieval

illuminated manuscripts, he is very precise about when he thinks such defacement began to occur: during the fifteenth century. He links this to the development of “the notion of privacy and the increasing social control of the church over aspects of public decency, as seen in the censure of carnival and other folkloric rites” [Camille 1998a: 151].

To support his idea, Camille refers to the existence of medieval manuscript imagery prior to the fifteenth century that is not ashamed to show nudity. The concepts of shame, privacy and obscenity (or what is considered to be obscene) are all interlinked. Illuminated manuscript imagery, including books for private reading which became more prevalent during the fifteenth century, signifies a highly personal and individual relationship with such imagery, and thus affords a private viewing (whereby, pornography may be said to have begun [see Saenger 1982]).

Sculptural imagery, such as sheelas, occupies a different, more public, space. This would have instilled greater reaction if such imagery was beginning to be unacceptable unless it was in the private zone. This notion of privacy is clearly of great importance when considering how attitudes towards imagery, such as sheela-na-gigs and other so-called sexually explicit representations, may have altered. The ‘modern’ attitude thus actually begins much earlier than the Victorian period.

In terms of sheelas, however, they are still being placed on buildings up to the seventeenth century and even later. For example, at Scregg the two sheelas have been removed from the earlier tower house and re-sited on a stone barn probably around the time the new house was built in 1760. They must, therefore, have retained a quality that was considered significant, and not offensive. It would suggest that although their sacredness may not have still been afforded them, their power in other ways was, even if this is only perceived in a watered-down version of apotropaia.

In addition to altering our views about when sexually-referenced imagery came to be seen as such, it is important to remind ourselves of what pre-fifteenth century medieval attitudes towards obscenity might have been and to be aware of our own restrictive modern views about medievalism, for “manifestations of what would pass for obscenity today abound in medieval literature and art ” [Ziolkowski 1998: 3].

What is considered obscene is shaped by culturally-defined paradigms of that which is acceptable and that which is taboo. However, there does appear to be a sexual implication in the word 'obscene' which I feel is a modern attachment. In relation to our understandings of medieval culture, Ziolkowski warns us that we must avoid taking extremes in viewing obscenity in the Middle Ages: "it is hazardous to assume that obscenity was everywhere – that people lived a crude life in which they took primitive pleasure in belching, farting, having sex and little else" [*ibid*: 11]. However, we should also not assume that obscenity was nowhere, he says.

Ziolkowski appears to assume that obscene equates with the sexual, and yet there is no supporting argument for why this is so. Does crudity actually equate with 'obscene'; after all, farting, belching, and having sex are all quite natural bodily functions, which may at times be pleasurable. Why should this be seen as obscene? Surely, it is in the social contextualisation where an evaluation of 'obscene' or not can be found? As McNair says:

"Definitions of the 'obscene' are relevant only to particular communities at particular times, while a sexually explicit image may only be sanctioned as 'obscene' if the community within which it is circulated declares it to be so."

[McNair 1996: 55]

The link between obscenity and pornography is a modern one [see McNair 1996: 41] and because of it obscenity is equated with the sexual. The earliest modern usage of the term 'pornography' is dated to 1806 referring to French material "associated with immorality and the need to protect society" [Hunt 1993: 14]. However, the etymology of the word 'obscene' suggests more of a link with the notion of the evil eye for it derives from the Latin *obsc(a)enus* meaning ill-omened [Oxford English Dictionary]. This whole area of obscenity, privacy, and pornography requires further research in relation to sheela-na-gigs, which I have not the space here to do.

However, suffice to say I am not sure whether an examination of 'obscenity' in the modern understanding of the term is actually relevant in relation to the medieval context. Particularly for my own subject of study, a possible understanding of what was, and was not, considered obscene (if indeed such a mode of thought would have been used at all in the medieval period) is, I think, more accessible by looking

at various other medieval contexts and attitudes, such as how bodies were viewed and the primary place that the sacred had within the medieval holistic view of the universe. 'Obscenity' may itself be a term peculiar to modernity. I don't think pre-fifteenth century medievals would have thought in terms of 'obscurity' in relation to exposure of the body because the body was seen as a microcosm of the universe and all was part of God's great scheme. Thus, in religious terms, an image showing a woman's sexual parts would not be viewed as obscene (because this implies a sexual attribution to such a display, and this is a modern understanding) but rather as a referent to her place in the spiritual scheme, perhaps interpreted as a symbol of divinity or of Original Sin, depending on how Augustinian the interpretation.

Ultimately, no matter when sheelas may have been defaced, removed or destroyed, their power as an image is highlighted by such action, for only imagery that challenges or threatens in some way would provoke such attack. The association of sheelas with the evil eye means they are there to protect; to deface the sheela would be to undermine this protection. In such defacement of sheelas we thus see represented the lack of understanding of the deeper meaning of apotropaia, as well as their sacredness (the deeper meaning of which I believe was lost even earlier). As attitudes towards the body and sex altered, so sheelas increasingly came to be seen – and were interpreted as having been intended to be seen – as negative representations of the female. Most, if not all, the available non-popularist literature on sheelas to date reiterates this attitude, reflecting the huge influence that the orthodox canon, whether religious or art-historical, has on the subject.

However, this has more recently been challenged by the embracing of sheelas within New Age spirituality and neo-paganism.¹ As referred to earlier in chapter four in my section on the Mother Goddess, Marija Gimbutas' work on goddesses [e.g. 1982; 1989] clearly has had an impact on popular interpretations of archaeological material, effecting response in academics as well, for example, Meskell [1995], and Pearson [1997]. References to sheelas seen directly as representations of the goddess abound both in popular and more academic literature (see, for example, Condren 1989; Jones 1991; Lomax 2001; and Moane 1997). Within some of this literature, gross mistakes can be seen in presentations of what sheelas are or represent (gargoyle and prehistoric goddess):

¹ The whole area of feminist or 'pseudo-feminist' (to borrow a term used by Meskell) interpretations for sheelas, notions of the goddess, and consequently the inevitable linking up of sheelas with neo-paganism is too vast for me to do justice to within this thesis. It is another area I would like to further research post-doctorally.

“Sheela-na-Gig is the squatting Hag, whose hands hold open Her yawning Vulva. Hers is the most blatant sexual image to be found in the pantheon of early British Goddesses and Gods ... Her image was used as a gargoyle to frighten away demons.”

[Jones 1991: 95]

Lomax (in a popular magazine article) places the ‘Sheila Na Gig’ as “a prehistoric fertility symbol depicting the fertile goddess displaying herself” [Lomax 2001: 65].

The appropriation of sheelas as significant symbols by neo-feminists, New Age-ists, and neo-pagans, trivialises the image by making it a cliché. The true significance of the sheela’s bodily representation is removed by placing her in modern commercial contexts such as a New Age shop, or in a book about Wicca (itself a twentieth century construct).²

The imagery is seen as shocking because we have aesthetically, socially and spiritually lost the ability to view naked bodies in ways other than sexual, and because the body and the sexual are fragmented from anything else. The New Age appropriation does reflect the power that sheelas still have as an image, but I believe the sacredness, in the true sense of the word, is incapable of being understood fully because of the modern approach to existence. Ironically, the new context for sheelas, that of being seen as a ‘fertility’ symbol, or a representation of ‘the goddess’ – in the modern understanding of these things- and as such as a radical spiritual symbol, in actual fact negates the sacredness by popularising the image as associated with superficial understandings of it.

I would like to end with reference to the work of Williams [1996] on the concept of the monster, for which sheelas may be included in the broadest sense of the term, and because he too refers to the modern assimilation of things once-sacred into the realm of the popular, although this does not necessarily mean the sacred is absent from the popular.

By the time of the Renaissance, the concept of the monster was changing, the new science producing a shift in focus from a more generalised worldview where all

² See Hutton [1999] and Hanegraaff [1995] for presentations of the creation of modern witchcraft.

reality was the subject, to a specific one where humans and human concepts were at the centre. In such a view monsters become demoted, says Williams, and where the monstrous had once operated at the highest levels of intellectual discourse, by the sixteenth century it was beginning to be reduced to the level of the popular, and thereby demoted intellectually. However, if we accept the suggestion that the world had become a human 'concept', the monster can only be seen in terms of marginalisation. In the post-medieval period, science saw itself as reflecting or imitating nature, because nature was the source and limit of what could be understood by the human intellect. This resulted in the narrowing of what was seen to be 'real' and the marginalisation and eventual obliteration of anything that did not fit in with this vision. Thus, God was replaced by Nature as the source for deformation.

The monstrous was demoted from the status of the sacred to that of the 'natural', and with this a division can be seen culturally between the 'educated' and the 'popular' [Park and Dalston 1981: 23]. This can be seen in modern understandings of marginal imagery – they are seen as 'lessons for the illiterate' (the un-educated), or they are re-appropriated into a wholly un-medieval pseudo-sacredness of New Age goddess-mythology (the popular).

Thus, for Williams, the medieval concept of the monstrous did not involve a contradiction of nature, but a contradiction of what humans understood of nature. Within medieval thinking, there was an allowance for the existence of beings outside of human knowing. During and after the Renaissance, however, there is a trend to control monstrosity and the contradictory by assimilating them into the known. It is in this way that approaches to sheelas have been seen. I have attempted in this thesis to break out of this post-medieval vision, to try and view sheelas in such a way to gain understanding or, rather, to acknowledge and demonstrate that understanding cannot necessarily be gained precisely because of what sheelas signify, for as I hope I have demonstrated, sheelas are part of the 'unknowable'. But in this deduction I am probably using a medieval understanding.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

I have tried to demonstrate in this thesis what sheela-na-gigs are and what they are not; what they look like and what they might mean. I have also attempted to place them in a variety of contexts to give substance to that meaning.

I see my work as the first attempt to discuss sheelas in depth in a scholarly way, and with a set of data that has been properly analysed. Andersen must also be given credit for his thesis when such a study, as an attempt at completeness, had never before been undertaken. I have already voiced my criticisms of his work.

There are several areas which I have identified through carrying out my research that I feel require further research and would greatly contribute to the continued study of sheelas:

- 1) A thorough study into the antiquarian contribution to sheela-na-gig awareness.
- 2) A feminist interpretation of sheelas.
- 3) The importance of notions of obscenity, pornography, and especially privacy, for medieval and modern interpretations of sheelas.
- 4) Neopaganism and the appropriation of sheelas into goddess / New Age ideologies.
- 5) The medieval significance of baldness / hair.
- 6) A full theoretical study into why marginal sculptural images cannot be equated with 'text'; why images cannot be 'read' like a book.
- 7) Biographies of Margaret Murray and Edith Guest, both of whom contributed substantially to sheela-na-gig information.

With the exception of the first two, I shall be researching into these areas and publishing my work post-doctorally.

Factual conclusions derived from my analysis of my field work data are presented in Chapter Two, demonstrating characteristics which may be viewed as 'typical' of a sheela. These include nakedness, display of the vulva (with over half having their fingers going into the vulva), and being carved in relief. However, there are also significant differences between sheelas in Britain and Ireland: a disproportionately large vulva is found in Britain but far less so in Ireland (see Table A, Chapter two, and Figure 1), and double the percentage of sheelas in Britain are found associated with patterns or objects than in Ireland.

In addition to the factual conclusions for locational and physical characteristics of the sheelas, broader conclusions I have reached which need further research are:

1) Sheelas as status symbols

Sheelas are likely to have altered in meaning between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. I suggest a change in meaning from complex apotropaic embedded within a medieval context to that of status symbol³ (of the wealthy patron of a church, such as at Devizes, or of the strength of a tower house family, such as at Blackhall or Dunnaman, for example) with remaindered limited understandings of apotropaia. Various comments in the gazetteer, regarding the positioning of sheelas on churches and secular buildings, support this proposition. Why, for example, are sheelas found on churches and tower houses in Ireland, but only on churches and not on castles in Britain? Is there a difference between what the Church represented in Ireland and Britain, in terms of social status and power, did it change over time, and might that be demonstrated iconographically?

This proposal is the basis for a future paper I will follow up post-doctorally.

2) Indigenous or parallel origin for sheelas in Ireland and subsequent move eastwards?

There is also some evidence, again highlighted in comments within the gazetteer, for a possibility (and I fully accept it is only a very tentative suggestion at this stage) that sheelas as a motif may have actually originated in the west – that they may be an Irish phenomenon originally – and moved eastwards, rather than east to west, as is usually suggested in the art-historical literature on Romanesque imagery. My feeling is that the images often suggested to be sheela-na-gigs in France – which is where the British and then Irish Romanesque iconography is stated to come from in the literature (Weir & Jerman [1986], for example) – are in fact exhibitionist figures and not sheelas. This whole issue requires further research, but could the sheela at Oaksey be an Irish figure re-used, for example? Why would the image be considered important enough to do this? Is this another example of a sheela being used for status value? Do the possible sheela images at Penmon represent a move from Ireland to Britain? The answer is unlikely to be clear-cut, but the suggestion that Ireland had some influence over sheelas in Britain one way or another is, I think, not to be discounted.

³ Camille [1998b: 236-7] similarly refers to the use of ‘babewyns’ (hybrid creatures depicted sculpturally linked with the notion of ‘baboon’ or ‘apeing’) in the medieval period associated with high status.

I have achieved what I set out to achieve at the start of my research, and feel I have produced a unique and scholarly piece of research on the subject, opening further areas for research on the subject. The achievements of the thesis can be summarised as:

- 1) A new assessment of the sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland, utilising raw fieldwork data to provide a highly detailed gazetteer. The gazetteer is not complete, and is a continuing project to be published at a later date.
- 2) A thorough critical analysis of the existing literature on sheelas, identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and interpretations which have influenced subsequent interpretations, as well as checking sheela details for accuracy.
- 3) A presentation of contexts: archaeological, medieval, post-medieval, theological, social, philosophical, art-historical, and New Age.
- 4) A critical application of theory taking a broad feminist and post-modern stance, and applying theoretical concepts such as liminality, ambiguity, and negative theology.

The 'surprise' element came in the form of the sacredness of the material, and resulted initially from my investigations into apotropaia, and Gell's [1998] work, where I began to view sheelas more as sigils, imbued with complex meaning and powers of entrapment. Through looking in depth at various contexts for the images I have been able to break out of the restrictive 'seeking function to find meaning' focus which dominates the literature. Instead, I am able to present sheelas as sacred entities which defy definition. In their ambiguity and liminality they represent the sacred; in their membership of the grotesque, which pertains to ambiguity, they represent the sacred. As a body of extreme beyond-human female bodies represented sculpturally, they resist categorisation, even within themselves. They are not 'other' but are beyond otherness. They retain a sense of the magical, whether in the Gell-sense or in the spiritual, and in this their vestigial sacredness is witnessed. This is what allows their modern appropriation to occur; this is what gives them continued life, even though their context has altered.

However, although we may lift the obscuring veil of what sheelas may have represented originally, inevitably that veil can never be removed completely, for if it were their significance would be rendered meaningless. For all the accusations of exhibitionism, sheelas are thus paradoxically and ultimately representations of that which can never and is not meant to be seen.

SHEELA-NA-GIG GAZETTEER

PART A: IRELAND

Earlier fieldwork sources commonly cited in this gazetteer (chronologically)

Other references are to be found in the sheela-specific bibliography.

Guest, E.M. 1936. 'Irish sheela-na-gigs in 1935'. *JRSAI*, 66: 107-129.

Andersen, Jørgen 1977. *The witch on the wall: medieval erotic sculpture in the British Isles*. London : George Allen & Unwin.

Roberts, Jack. [1995?] *The sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland: an illustrated guide*. Skibbereen: Key Books.

----- 1997. *An illustrated map of the sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland*.

[?]: Bandia.

McMahon, J. and Roberts, J. 2001. *The sheela-na-gigs of Ireland and Britain: the divine hag of the Christian Celts: an illustrated guide*. Cork: Mercier.

Weir, A. and Jerman, J. 1986. *Images of lust: sexual carvings on medieval churches*. London: Routledge.

Guest's Typology [1936: 109]:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Type I | Arms (which are usually in front of the thighs but may pass behind them) flexed, and hands directed to the lower abdomen, with: |
| (a) | Thighs splayed |
| (b) | Thighs absent or slightly indicated |
| (c) | Legs straight down |
| Type II | One arm and hand raised to the head: legs as in Type I(a) |
| Type III | Thighs and knees tightly flexed over the abdomen. |

Weir & Jerman's classification [1986: 126]:

- 1 Sheela-na-gigs with both hands passed below the thighs from behind, fingers inserted in the vulva
- 2 Figures with only one hand passed behind
- 3a Figures with both hands passed in front to touch the pudenda
- 3b Figures with both hands only indicating the pudenda
- 4 Figures with one hand either touching or indicating the pudenda
- 5 Anomalous figures, with sheela-like characteristics but too eroded or damaged to be accurately ascribed a class

My defining characteristics for classifying a sheela


- 1 Disproportionately large head
- 2 Baldness
- 3 Naked
- 4 Vulva exposed
- 5 Hand or fingers gesturing towards vulval area
- 6 Disproportionately small legs

Additional supporting characteristics


- 7 Hands or fingers frequently inserted into vulva
- 8 Often no neck

Quick reference for sites visited

1. Abbeylara	13. Cashel (c)	24. Killinaboy
2. Ballinderry	14. Castelmagner	25. Kiltinan
3. Ballyfinboy	15. Cloghan	26. Liathmor
4. Ballynacarriga	16. Clomantagh	27. Moate
5. Ballynaclogh	17. Clonmacnois	28. Rath Blathmac
6. Ballynahinch	18. Doon	29. Redwood
7. Ballyvourney	19. Dunnaman	30. Scregg (1)
8. Behy	20. Fethard abbey	31. Scregg (2)
9. Blackhall	21. Fethard town	32. Taghmon
10. Bunratty	22. Holycross abbey	33. Toomregan
11. Cashel (a)	23. Kildare cathedral	34. Tullavin
12. Cashel (b)		


1	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Abbeylara / Map 41. Longford Edge of village, monastic site 14 September 2001 Ruinous Cistercian abbey Interior S wall of tower c. 13' – 14' Primary Sheela is sandstone. The rest of the abbey's stone appears to be a flat, grey, slate-like type of stone, but the wall the sheela is in has both this stone and sandstone present in it, although the internal wall opposite does not.</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>Extremely weathered sheela. Carved almost in the round, protruding from the wall (similar to Holdgate). The image is c. 14"–15" tall x 7"–8" wide at widest point. Head: Disproportionately large to rest of body being c. 5"–6" long. Eyes: Very weathered. Her right eye is more visible than her left which is barely discernible. Ears: both present although her right is much better preserved. Nose: Outline visible but no detail. Mouth: Too weathered now to be visible. Neck: none. Legs: Looks like the knees are bent up and arms are going round them and under the thighs / buttocks with hands clearly going into vulva. Arms: Her left arm is visible, with a sort of hunched shoulder, bent at elbow and going down across lower left leg which is bent up at knee. Where so-called 'breasts' are may actually be the top of the bent up knees. 4 indentations in this 'breast'/'bent up knee' area. Anus: Clearly visible. Belly button: Possibly shown. 'Lumpiness' under chin – can't make out what it is.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history	<p>The monastery was completed in AD 1214, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Founded by Sir Richard Tuite (Anglo-Norman), who also built a motte and bailey in 1200 at Granard. In 1315 Edward, brother of Robert the Bruce, seized the monastery and wintered there. The monks returned in 1316. The abbey was surrendered to Henry VIII at the dissolution.</p>	
	Other features	<p>The image is to the left of a now filled-in Gothic arch, and to the right of what was probably another arch.</p>	
	Topography	<p>In the vicinity are 2 holy wells, the Well of the Holy Women being closest to the abbey. Also in</p>	

		the vicinity are a stone circle, 4 standing stones, and a linear earthwork called the Black Pig's Dyke or Race which was possibly a boundary during the Iron Age between the Celtic kingdoms of Ulster and Midh; it is 6.25 miles long. All these features are to the N of the abbey.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 118, No 52] Says it was all obscured by ivy.</p> <p>b) <u>Hartnett</u>, P.J. 1954. 'Sheela-na-gig at Abbeylara, Co. Longford', <u>JRSAI</u>, 84(2): 181.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 144] Observes three weathered cavities in chest area, and anus, as well as "raised middle strand" in vulva.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: In gazetteer [p.160]; on distribution map [p.126] where they describe it as an anomalous figure due to its great erosion; List B Ireland [p.118].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 30] No drawing. Calls this sheela an example of the "original early type", even though the figure is so badly weathered. Also states the figure is "an early figure of the Goddess" for which the three indentations round the area of the breasts are given as evidence. [1997 map]: has drawing (same as below).</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 111]: With drawing. [I would say they have visited this site.] They say the figure is "rather weathered", and that it protrudes from the inside wall of a C15th tower; "there are three deep indentations around the area of the breasts, the vulva is oval shaped with a raised vertical section, and the anus is clearly indicated". This 'raised vertical section', I think, is actually where the hands go in to the vulva, showing up as the line between where the fingers go in on either side.</p>
	Other information / comments	


2.	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building</p> <p>Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion</p> <p>Geology</p>	<p>Ballinderry castle / Map 46. M 463446 Galway In a field 11 September 2001 Tower house (under repair for dwelling) The sheela is on a keystone (c.10" tall x c.13" wide at top narrowing to 8.5" at bottom), centrally placed above the main doorway on the E wall. 6'6" Probably secondary, based on the keystone not looking like it's in original situ: it does not fit the space properly whereas all the other stones in the doorway do. Not conclusive however – see below (other sculpture/decoration). Limestone</p>	
	<p>Description of sheela</p>	<p>Head: c. 4" long which is about half total length from top of head to bottom of torso. Eyes: Almond-shaped, open, smallish and quite close together. Nose: Nostrils clearly visible, nose less so but broad with sides coming down in line with inside of eyes. Chin: Pointed. Ears: her right ear very clearly visible; the left is higher up and less obvious. 'Plaits': Plaited pattern to right of her head and similar interlaced pattern to her left of head – but it is not hair – the head is proud of these patterns, i.e. the 'plaits' are behind the head, and separate from it. The head itself is bald. Two or three furrow lines on forehead. Neck: none. Arms: thin, coming down sides of body, towards the groin area, with hands going into vulva. Hands: Her left hand is more clearly visible than her right, which is badly denuded. Breasts: long, thin, going out to the sides from under the armpits. Belly: very rotund and deep belly button clearly shown. Vulva: area comes down into a raised wide upside down 'V' shape. From the bottom of this vulval area there is something being eliminated / extruded. It could be afterbirth, a baby, or excrement (the most likely). There is a clear line at the bottom of the vulva, however, and it looks like there is an anus below this from which excrement is being eliminated. Legs: Appear to be quite thin, very wide apart, slightly bent at the knees, feet facing outwards. Her lower right leg is badly damaged, while her left is badly damaged from the thigh to the ankle.</p>	

	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>To the sheela's right there is a daisy-type flower with 6 petals, and below this a (quite faint) triquetra; to her left, near her ear, a triskele-type pattern, and below this another flower with 8 petals.</p> <p>Immediately above the figure is a single-light ogee-headed window with a plait pattern at its top left. There are 3 more single-light ogee-headed windows above, all without pattern. However, at the E end of the S wall, below where the bartizan (at SE corner) has been, there is single-light ogee-headed window which has patterns either side at the top, of a donkey / horse, and of a 6-petal flower design very similar to that next to the sheela. These windows are in original situ. Has the patterning near the sheela been picked up from these earlier windows? Could the sculptural embellishment on the windows have been added when the sheela was inserted? Or are both windows and sheela contemporary? Pecked pattern embellishing quoin stones.</p>
	Architectural history	Probably quite a late tower house (i.e. C16th or C17th) as the windows are mostly either long thin slit or single-light ogee-headed, suggesting defensive qualities.
	Other features	Bartizan at NW corner has also been removed. Spy-hole at right of door. Very small round-arch window to right of spy-hole. Doorway is softly arched.
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936]: Not in.</p> <p>b) <u>Costello</u>, T.B. 1936. 'A Co. Galway sheela-na-gig', <u>JRSAI</u>, 66: 312, & Pl.</p> <p>c) <u>Guest</u>: [1937: 178]: "Another of the rare examples carrying ornament is the recently discovered figure at Ballinderry Castle" [here, she references <u>JRSAI</u>, 1936, 6(6): 312 and Pl. 44: 1, no author given]. "The simple guilloche and plait, the six-rayed rosette, the triskele and triquetra, help us little, for they may range over four centuries or more. The other rosette, of naturalistic form with a double system of blunted petals is a late form, and is to be compared with floral designs at St Kevin's and St Saviour's, Glendalough, all attributed to the twelfth century. It may be suggested that the ornament is a later addition, but the exact fit as keystone of the arch and the fact that its shaping as such in no way interferes with the carving indicated that gateway and carving are contemporary. If so, we arrive at an even later date, as the castle is attributed to the fifteenth century."</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u>: [p.144] Referring to Nolan's article [1900], Andersen states the castle dates to a little after 1540. Also states the sheela is "seated as if on a stool ... Behind the head a pleated ornament, also a wheel ornament of six spokes, another circle with three spokes,</p>

		<p>and a heraldic rose” [p.144]. His photo shows the triquetra. Argues that the sheela is in original situ being on the original keystone [p.99]. However, just above this he also says that the sheela has been “fitted in above the pointed arch of the main door” [p.99], which suggests a later insertion. Perhaps, Andersen, too, was unsure.</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: In gazetteer [p.160], on distribution map [p.126], in List B Ireland [p.118]. Photo [p.149], which clearly shows a triquetra beneath the 6-petalled flower; this is only faintly visible now. Weir & Jerman say the stone may be a voussoir or a keystone; they put forward an apotropaic function due to the location above the doorway.</p> <p>f) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 32] Declares “this is a very important example of a sheela-na-gig. The figure is depicted on a background of Celtic style patterns: knotwork based on three threads and three geometric circles, each of which represents an example of the triple symbolism related to the ancient lore of Sun/Moon/Goddess worship. A ‘triskele’ motif, a symbol of triple swastika type related to the Isle of Man emblem, a ‘marigold motif’, which expresses the six-fold division, and a ‘sun-wheel’ consisting of eight annual sun divisions of the ancient calendar”. However, Roberts does not explain why, if these patterns are truly representative of a link between the sheelas and goddess worship, this is the only example of a sheela that has them. Roberts suggests other sheelas exhibit solar / lunar symbolism (as at Ballinacarriga which he says has a crescent moon over her right eye and the vulva depicted as a rounded ‘yoni’ [p.13]), but there are no other sheelas associated with actual Celtic-style patterns. Drawing does not show the triquetra.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 114]: Less emphasis on the symbolism, but clearly indicate that this figure is the only one associated with such Celtic-style motifs: “It is a unique and important example since the figure is depicted on a background of Celtic-style patterns ... Celtic knotwork based on three strands passing behind the head ... a triskele or triquetra, a hexafoil rose and a marigold motif with eight divisions.” Their drawing depicts both a triskele and a triquetra. They seem to have altered the ‘marigold’ motif from being the pattern with six petals [see above], which is now the ‘rose’, to the ‘sun wheel’ with eight divisions. They interpret the substance being eliminated as a “rush of liquid, perhaps indicating urine or menstruation, or some other unidentified object”.</p>
	Other information / comments	I think the patterns are more likely to be associated with the evil eye / apotropaic function, as ‘entrapments’ [see Gell, and DiStasi], which would also explain their use at the windows.



3.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Ballyfinboy / Map 53. R 898936 Tipperary 25 July 2000 Tower house External W. wall at S. corner on quoin stone ? ? Limestone, castle and sheela	
	Description of sheela	Quoin stone is c. 2' wide x 15" high. The sheela is rebated 1cm deep and is in bas relief. Head: very round but with slightly pointed chin. No hair, no ears. Mouth: incised line, slightly down-turned at each side. Eyes: incised, large and round. Nose: in relief. Arms: too long to be realistic, go behind thighs, and are touching or holding open the vulva. Breasts: immediately above abdomen; small, fingernail shaped, pointing outwards towards outer body. Ribs: incised lightly. Abdomen: from upper chest to where it meets thighs and vulva is egg-shaped and distended. Giving birth? Anus: (1cm across x 0.75cm deep) where hands meet below vulva. Vulva: 1.25" long x 0.5" wide at widest point. Legs: bent at knees, with outward turned feet. Her right foot has 3 visible toes; her left foot has no toes visible.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Plain Gothic-style arch doorway in S. wall. No other decoration	
	Architectural history		
	Other features	W. wall: 3 arrow-slot windows at 1 st floor level. Below these to right (S.) is a window (for spiral staircase) with the sheela to the right of this. Above arrow-slit windows at 2 nd floor level is a tall plain round-headed window. On 3 rd floor, two more ruined windows. On ground floor level, one plain window. N. wall: collapsed and ivy-clad. E. wall: very ivy-clad. One plain rounded tall window on ground floor level, with gap for possible 2 nd one to its right (large, tall vertical worked stone remaining as part of window, with gap and rubble to its right).	

	Topography	Castle on slight mound. Surrounding landscape fairly flat with no outstanding features.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Smith, O'Brien R.</u> 1906. 'Sheela-na-gig, Ballyfinboy Castle, near Borrisokane', <i>JRSAI</i>, 36: 88.</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936:111, No 9 & fig. 5]: "About one mile west of Borrisokane. In a sunk panel on a quoin at the south corner of the west wall; about 14 feet from the ground. Type 1(a)." References Smith [1906].</p> <p>c) <u>Guest</u>: [1937: 178-9]: " ... a twelfth century castle, the figure is cut vertically in a panel on the quoin, which it does not fill and is in execution by no means one of the crudest." She cites O'Donovan [18?: 152] as stating that "the carving is certainly not older than the castle."</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u>: [p.144]: quotes from both Guest's entries, and adds: "Standing figure, with knees splayed to accommodate the gesture of the hands, which seem to have passed below the thighs and to have met (this is no longer very clear) around the sagging middle of the abdomen. Heavy shoulders and arms." [p. 104]: close-up photograph of the sheela; [p. 107]: Photograph of the sheela on the quoin stone.</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: In gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.127], class 1; listed in List B, Ireland [p.118]; drawing [p.12].</p> <p>f) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 24]: With drawing: "The castle stands close to the Ballyfinboy River about a mile south of Borrisokane. It is a 12th century castle and the figure can be found on a cornerstone some 12 or 13 feet above the ground ...".</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 114-5]: With similar drawing to above but a rather different entry! "The castle stands close to the Ballyfinboy River about two kilometres west of Borrisokane. It is actually a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century tower house, and the Sheela is considered contemporary with its construction as it is carved on a quoin stone which appears to harmonise with the other stones ... The hands pass below the thighs and meet around the 'sagging middle of the abdomen'."</p>
	Other information / comments	


4.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Ballynacarriga Castle / Map 85. W 287508 Cork About 3 miles ESE of Dunmanway 3 September 2001 Tower house External, N. edge of E. wall, at 2 nd or 3 rd floor level c. 40' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	<p>The image is in relief on a stone c. 2' high x 10"-11" wide. Head: is about a third of total body. Top of head rounded – no hair visible – with oval / pointed shape to face. Ears: very prominent R. ear, quite high up side of head, like a handle. Eyes, nose, mouth: all visible. Mouth: incised straight line. Nose: Lines visible coming down from under nose, out to the sides to the mouth, particularly the r.h. side. Quite a bulbous-ended nose. Neck: Tiny, thin, almost no neck in fact. Shoulders & chest: Large, broad, shoulders, and broad chest / upper torso. Breasts: none visible. Arms: both bent slightly inwards at elbows, with lower arms going behind & under thighs, hands coming out either side of well-defined vulva. Vulva: Lozenge shape. Quite small by comparison with many sheelas and in relation to the size of this image, but quite large in relation to the size of her legs. Very well-defined lower part of vulva and entrance to vulva itself. Hands: her left hand has 3 clearly defined fingers; her r. hand is not clear. Hips: are tiny and very narrow, and the legs / hips are not in proportion to the rest of her body, being much smaller. Legs: bent at knees & feet turned outwards. No toes visible.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	None that I could observe.	
	Architectural history	O'Hurley castle, built c. AD1585.	
	Other features	E. wall: has main doorway & 12 windows. Bartizan at junction of E. wall with S. wall. N. wall: smaller windows than in E. wall, apart from top right, large round-arched one. On 1st floor, in	

		<p>centre of wall, is a single-light ogee-headed slit window. Bartizan at junction of N. & W. walls. There are 2 stones sticking out from the wall by a foot or so, the highest one immediately below a window; they look similar to antae found on Irish churches. W. wall: 4 windows up to half-way height of wall only. 3rd window up is again in centre, & is single-light ogee-headed. Immediately to right of this window is a tiny 'window' c. 6" high x 2.5" wide. S. wall: 4 windows, including at top left large round-arched one as in N. wall. Some repair work (which looks quite recent) may indicate another window which has been filled in at centre of wall. At N.E. corner of castle is a later extension wall, with chamfered window / gunning placement?</p> <p>To S.E. of castle, c.50 yds. Away, is the base and part of wall of what looks like a round tower.</p>
	Topography	<p>To W. and immediately at foot of castle is a river. The castle is on a small steep hill; although not on the summit, it has a good vantage point and views, particularly to N.</p>
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Anon.</u> 1906. <i>JCHAS</i>, 12: 26; & 76-77. Plates facing pp. 76 & 78 show the carvings from the second floor interior, where to the "SW is an ornamented window ... having curious carving of a woman pointing to carved roses overhead – three joined together, two also; they are supposed to Catherine Cullinane and her children" [p.77]. The sheela is referred to as "a grotesque figure in limestone, which is supposed to be the owner of the castle looking down with contempt at his enemies" [p.77]. There are a good number of other carvings in this castle: in the living portion, an "ornamented window to the east over the principal door"; the main room of the castle was used as a chapel before the present Catholic church was built in 1815 at Ballynacarriga. The article refers to "many old inhabitants remember having assisted at Mass there" [p.77]. This 'chapel' room has two windows both cased with limestone and richly carved with ecclesiastically-related imagery or figures. The castle is late C16th, although reputed to be a re-build of an earlier Hurley residence (at Gloun about a mile further south, where "extensive remains of buildings are there still to be seen" [p.76]), built by Randal Hurley.</p> <p>b) 1959. <i>JCHAS</i>, 64: 53 [letter, referred to below].</p> <p>c) <u>Guest</u>: Not in.</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u>: No photo. Quotes The Shell guide to Ireland [1967: 85], and the Journal of the Cork Historical & Archaeological Society [1959: 53], the latter states that the figure has plaits. Andersen did not visit this figure himself.</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p. 160]; on distribution map [p.127], class 1;</p>

		<p>in List B, Ireland [p.118]. No photo or drawing.</p> <p>f) The <i>Archaeological Inventory of County Cork, vol. 1: West Cork</i> [1992: 321-322]: “Tower house and bawn. Four-storey tower. Sheila-na-gig on outer E. face at 1st floor level. Notable series of carvings on soffit stones of window embrasures on S wall at 1st and 3rd floor levels; N wall at 3rd floor level. First-floor carving of figure and five rosettes said to represent Catherine O Cullane and her children [Hurley 1906: 77]. Third-floor carvings include inscription ‘1585 R.M. C.C.’ (Randal Muirhily (Hurley) and his wife Catherine O Cullane). Also depicted are the Crucifixion, Instruments of the Passion, and figures which may represent St John, Blessed Virgin, and St Paul, as well as decorative panels [Hurley 1906: 77]. Tower may be a century older than 1585 when upper storeys were probably modified. Surviving features of bawn enclosure are remains of circular tower just to E of castle, and short section of wall running N from E end of N wall”.</p> <p>g) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 21]: With drawing. Says that “circular geometric design identifies it as being related to the ancient Solar/Lunar symbolism. The castle was also used as a church or chapel and the top floor is renowned for its decorated stones depicting religious motifs. It is dedicated to a woman Catherine Cullinane (Collins), and she is depicted on carvings inside the chapel in conjunction with motifs of the ancient Goddess religion”. Roberts’ statement that the castle is dedicated to Catherine Collins is based on the information in the 1906 article.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 113-114]: With similar drawing to above. limit what they say about the ancient Lunar/Solar symbolism to “what looks like a lunar crescent encircles her right eye”. Also describe her as “well-preserved ... located quite high up on the east facing wall of the castle, above the main entrance door. The right hand passes beneath the thigh while her left hand passes on top of the other thigh ... ”.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>This castle was obviously that of a wealthy and powerful family. The richness of the carvings on the interior further support this, and the fact that Mass was said there reflects the significance of the castle as a vital part of the community. The existence of a sheela as the only carving on the exterior may be a demonstration of the status of the castle and the social power of the family, as I also suggest for the castle at Dunnaman, in addition to having apotropaic significance.</p>


5.	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type</p> <p>Location within building</p> <p>Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Ballynaclogh / Map 66. R 984406 Tipperary</p> <p>22 July 2000 Circular castle – type known, locally, as a ‘piggin’ due to its similarity to a drinking vessel by the same name. Exterior, above N facing doorway, & beneath a single-light, ogee-headed window. c. 10’ Primary Limestone, both building and block sheela is on</p>	 <p>N doorway</p>	 <p>Stone block beneath window</p>
	Description of sheela	<p>Impossible to actually see the sheela due to lichen cover, and lack of definition. Landowner [Jimmy Ryan] pointed out where she is. Rectangular block 12” tall x 16” wide. Jimmy described the sheela (it was still visible within the last 5 years). The top part of her is like the drawing of the sheela at Ballynahinch (in Roberts’ guide), except there were no facial features or ears visible. The arms came out from the body bent at the elbow; the legs were bent outwards & then inwards again with the feet meeting at heels.</p>		
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>Single-light, plain ogee-headed window on N wall above doorway. Doorway with pointed arch, otherwise plain.</p>		
	Architectural history			
	Other features	<p>Castle has a single chimney. 2 supporting buttresses, one either side of doorway. The castle is on a small, artificial mound, with banks and ditches in the immediate and surrounding vicinity. Some indication of walls, mostly to N side of castle.</p>		
	Topography			
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in b) <u>Andersen</u>: Not in c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p>		

		<p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: In Roberts' 1997 map but with poor referencing to location: "about 5 miles W of Cashel and about 1 mile N of Golden". His 1995 guide refers to it as "said to be situated in the small Norman castle which is on the west side of a lane which runs north-south through the area. To reach it take the road west to Hore Abbey at Golden on the main Dublin-Cork road south of Cashel and look for a lane to the west"! It is, therefore, unlikely that Roberts has visited this sheela. No drawing of it in either publication.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 115]: No drawing. "This small, round Norman castle is situated about four kilometres north-west of Golden, which is about seven kilometres west of Cashel. This figure was listed by the National Museum but there is no trace of a Sheela on the remains of the original castle though she could be underneath the rampant ivy that currently covers virtually the whole south-west side of the castle." The 'National Museum list' they refer to is, presumably, Cherry [1992].</p>
	Other information / comments	The castle is in a poor state of preservation, and may collapse very soon, particularly the E side where there are 2 serious cracks and the wall is bulging outwards.

6.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Ballynahinch castle/ Map 66. S 036408 Tipperary 23 July 2000 Tower house Above main entrance doorway at E side c. 20' Secondary (possibly came from nearby church?) Limestone – castle & sheela	
	Description of sheela	On a limestone block c. 18" tall x 12" wide. Head: has a round, bald top, with more pointed than rounded chin. Ears: at side of head in centre. Furrowed lines on brow. Eyes: almond-shaped. Arms: coming out from body and bent out at elbows, hands down towards top of vulva with fingers possibly going in to vulva. Legs: her left leg is raised higher than her right. Legs apart, bent at the knees, & heels nearly together with feet outwards. Breasts: None visible. Anus: possible.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	No other sculpture	
	Architectural history		
	Other features	Heavily defensive tower house with very good preservation. Most of surrounding courtyard wall (i.e. c. 70%) still in tact. Gunning placement in SW corner in good condition, another in NW corner (collapsed). <u>S wall:</u> 6 narrow loop windows high up, & 1 plain rectangular window (not ogee). <u>W wall:</u> is very close to courtyard wall (c.10' distance between them), with blocked-up, double-light ogee-headed window; 3 narrow loop windows; small, plain rectangular window to left of ogee. <u>E wall:</u> Main doorway above which is a crack going all way up to large hole where another ?double-light ogee-headed window has been. Above this is a machicolation.	


		Immediately to N of castle (c. 20') is the main entrance into the courtyard.
	Topography	River Suir to the S, which has a small rise to the S side of the river. To SE is another ruined building: quite large, long, low and rectangular, with an old wall surrounding it. Could be monastic. About 0.25 miles to N is a ruined church, impossible to date.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Crawford</u>: 1906. <i>JRSAI</i>, 36: 423-424, & Pls. facing p. 424. "The entrance is in the north wall, nearly opposite to the north-east angle of the keep, and the doorway of the latter is in the east side near the same angle ... Above the doorway is a very perfect sheela-na-gig ... [p.424].</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 110, No. 8 & fig. 4]: "over a door in the east wall of the Peel tower, about 20 feet from the ground. 'Mr Clibborn stated that the person who examined it supposed it came from the ruins of the neighbouring church'. Type 1(a)." She references <i>PRIA</i>, II, 1840-44: 575 (the Clibborn quote), and <i>JRSAI</i>, 1906, 36: 424, which has a photograph of castle and figure.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 145]: With photograph. "Close to the NW bank of the river Suir, above a door in the E wall of the peel tower, about 6m. from the ground. Widely splayed posture, a mixture of standing and sitting, with arms akimbo. Hands joined above pudenda, clearly indicated. Big, round head with unusual detail, an open mouth, round eyes with pupils indicated, and billowy lines across the forehead. H. c. 2 feet." References: <i>JRSAI</i>, 1906 (as above), and <i>Guest</i> (as above). [p. 12]: Sketch from <i>Wright</i> [1866], which <i>Andersen</i> thinks is the Ballynahinch sheela although it is called 'Ballynahend' by <i>Wright</i>. [p. 99]: Says the Ballynahinch figure is defensive as it is over the doorway. "Her posture shows clearly an almost dancing variation of a standing attitude, with the knees turned out, and the arms akimbo in a kind of jagged rhythm. A double or treble fold of the brow seems to contradict her stance, and the reference to her genitals is not so explicit as in other examples." He does not think she has come from any church setting.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.160]; on distribution map [p.127], class 3b; omitted from List B, Ireland [p.118]. No picture.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: In <i>Roberts</i>' 1997 map, located as being "2 miles east of Ballynaclogh." In his 1995 guide, he says "north of Ballynaclogh and Hore Abbey is this castle which stands alongside the river Suir. The sheela-na-gig is about 18 feet up on the main tower, over the door." Drawing of the sheela in both publications.</p>

		<p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 116]: With drawing. "Ballynahinch castle is about four kilometres west of Cashel, on its northern side, but near the west bank of the river Suir. The Sheela-na-Gig is over the door about six metres from the ground on the main tower and was said to have come from the ruins of a nearby church to the north of the castle. The hands are joined above the pudenda and the legs are widely splayed. The head is large and round, the eyes have pupils clearly marked and there are wavy lines across the forehead. (60cm high)".</p> <p>Judging from the drawing I would say that they have not visited this sheela in person.</p>
	Other information / comments	


7.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Ballyvourney / Map 79. W 197767 Cork About 10 miles NW of Macroom on the N22 road to Killarney 5 September 2001 Ruined church External, S wall of nave, at E end. Above a window. 10' – 10'6" Secondary 'Sheela' stone is different from lintel stone. Both are shale-like, with 'layers', but the 'sheela' stone has thinner layers. Both these types of stone are also to be found within the rest of the wall.	
	Description of sheela	This image is almost definitely not a sheela. It looks more like an image in death-like repose, perhaps originally from a tomb slab, even a child's? The image is c. 9.5" tall x 4.5" wide and is carved in relief. Head: round and in proportion to the rest of the body. No ears. Eyes: closed. Nose and mouth visible, mouth slightly open. Neck: in proportion. Arms: come down sides of body, bending at elbows, lower arms crossing over groin area at wrists. Nothing remains of the image below where the hands cross.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Head inserted (secondary insertion) above chancel arch. Scratched crosses on either side of small slit window (interior) of E wall of chancel, next to Station 6 of the Round. The black round ball (referred to particularly by Roberts) is in a niche on the W wall.	
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Guest</u> : [1936: 110, No 4, fig. 3]: "A small figure known as St Gobonet, cut in an ovoid depression on a rough lintel over a trefoil window at the east end of the south wall. It shows no definite features of a sheela-na-gig except the pose of the arms, but it seems to be connected with rites of very ancient origin. Type 1(b)." References: S. Lewis, 1839. <i>Topographical dictionary</i> , v.1: 169; G.V. Du Noyer, <i>Ordnance Sketches</i> , in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, v.1: 10-12. b) <u>Guest</u> : [1937: 374-384]: 'Ballyvourney and its sheela-na-gig', <i>Folklore</i> , 48. A fuller discussion of the figure which Guest clearly thinks is a sheela. She also discusses the part the figure plays in the "Rounds". Guest goes on to postulate a direct link between sites	

		<p>dedicated to saints with a Celtic or pagan origin that also have 'sheelas' and are connected with wells. So, included are the Castelmagner 'sheela'; that from Castlewidenham [now ex-situ, Castletownroche; the figure was originally lost "but in 1906 it was recovered and in 1934 it was placed near the tower of the nearby castle", Cherry 1993: 109]; Dowth; Seir Kieran; Lemanaghan Castle, Co. Offaly, where in the C19th there was supposed to be a sheela, "now missing" [Guest 1937: 381]; Killinaboy (where "there are three holy wells in the parish" [Guest 1937: 382]; Rath Blathmaic, which Guest says "has no sacred well , but close by is the magic lake of Rath, where twenty-five banshees washed the visionary clothes of the invaders doomed to die ... " [Guest 1937: 382]. Guest relates other folkloric elements to sheela-na-gig existence and placement, particularly tales of supernatural cattle and horses.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 145]: With photograph. "Female figure carved in ovoid depression in a stone, that is fitted in roughly as a lintel, set at a slant over a trefoil window at the E end of the S wall. Posture probably standing, but the lower half appears to be missing. Arms pointing towards the abdomen, as in many sheela figures." References: Du Noyer, G.V. <i>Sketches</i>, v.2: 90, in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries (not 'Ordnance sketches', in the RIA Library, which Andersen says Guest incorrectly referenced); Guest [1936]; and Guest [1937].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Not listed.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 22]: With (poor) drawing. "A small Sheela-na-Gig carved into one of the window lintels on the south side of the church or Abbey. The style is similar to the Castlemagner Sheela-na-Gig. Saint Gobnait is the 'saint of the bees' which directly relates her to the Earth Mother Goddess of ancient times. The old church or abbey is still the centre of devotional pilgrimage and part of the ritual 'rounds' at this shrine is touching the Sheela-na-Gig and placing one's hand into a hole within which is the 'black ball'. A wooded [sic] painted statuette of St Gobnait used to be brought out on the saint's day 11th February, but like the black ball this was discontinued by the clergy sometime during the last century."</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 116-117]: With very similar (poor) drawing as above. "This very small and benign Sheela-na-Gig can be found carved into an oval recess at an odd angle on a reused lintel over a window on the south wall of the church. The hands point towards her lower abdomen or genital area and although the legs are missing, the figure</p>
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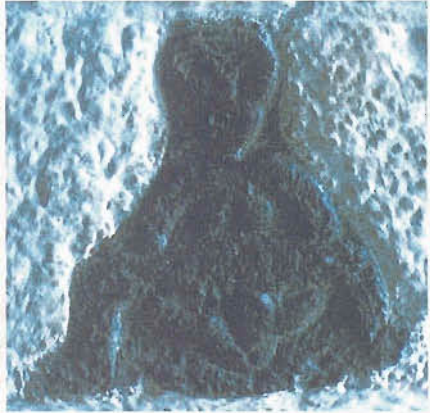
		appears to be standing. She is probably a later but important example of a Sheela-na-Gig as the old church is an important pilgrimage centre and the practice of touching the Sheela-na-Gig, which is regarded as an actual image of St Gobnait, is still part of the ritual rounds at this shrine. (18cm high)".
	Other information / comments	<p>The church is part of a pilgrimage site, associated with the C5th St Gobnait. There is a Holy well which is part of the pilgrimage complex, c. 800 m. to the S of the church, and not particularly close to it. The supposed grave of St Gobnait is not far from the church. Roberts [1995] may have been imposing a similarity between the sheela at Castlemagner with the Ballyvourney image, despite their being very different, to make a connection with both of them being associated with holy well sites. But, in my opinion, neither of these images are sheela-na-gigs.</p> <p>Guest's [1937] references to folkloric aspects that may (or may not) be connected with sheela-na-gigs are interesting, and require further, separate study which I cannot undertake within this thesis. However, it is probable that inferences such as those that Guest has made about folkloric connections have influenced, or are a reflection of, how sheelas have been viewed in previous centuries before any antiquarian started to try and define them.</p>

8.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Behy castle / Map 25. G 719194 Sligo Farm with very ruined tower house 13 September 2001 Originally on tower house Now on wall in stone outbuilding of farm. This building was originally the dwelling house of the present owner's parents. The wall with the sheela now on it was once part of their main living room. Not relevant At least secondary / ex-situ Unsure	
	Description of sheela	<p>Carved in deep relief, the figure has been painted with green but is mostly a rust colour. The stone she is on has a notched design background and a notched large cross. Could not do a proper recording of the figure as it was not a situation that allowed this. Thus, description taken from my slide photos.</p> <p>Head: About a third of total body length (to feet). Long head with squared off top, wider at top tapering to chin. Head turned slightly to her right. No hair. Eyes: Deep-set, defined by incised lines. Her left eye is bigger than her right. Nose: well defined, quite oblong, with indentation for nostrils (looks like one in centre rather than two separate nostrils). Mouth: Small, open, no expression. Ears: her left ear is clearly visible; right may be there but cannot see clearly from slide, and because her right hand is held up to this side of the face. Neck: none. There appears to be an object around where the neck would be, however. It looks like a rope, or even a sickle-shaped object as there is possibly a handle. Torso: Quite chunky, with strong shoulders, and sides of torso straight up and down. Breasts: Clearly defined, quite high up the body, forward facing, quite pendulous but not large. Arms: Her right arm is bent at the elbow and goes up to right side of face, with hand apparently curled in, as though resting her head on it, but with the index (or little?) finger pointing up to forehead; her right arm is bent slightly at the elbow and goes down to the left inner thigh, not touching the vulva at all. Cannot see evidence for belly button, or ribs. Lower belly may be distended. Clearly defined</p>	

		lines at join of torso to thighs where leg would bend naturally at hip. Vulva: clearly defined, hanging down slightly below groin area, with deeply incised hole. Legs: Quite widely apart, right leg bent at knee with knee clearly shown, left leg straighter. Feet: outward facing, left foot appears to be damaged. No toes visible.
	Other sculpture/decoration	The sheela is carved on a horizontal stone at its right end, between a half and a third of the stone's total size. There are very clear decorative marks on the stone, various lines notched out behind the sheela, a series of vertical lines to her left, and then next to this a large 'X' created from notches.
	Architectural history	
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: Not in</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 31]: No picture. Unsure of whereabouts, "only scant remains of castle still standing and it is thought locally that the Sheela-na-Gig has been removed in recent years".</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 117-8]: Photograph on cover of book, and drawing [p.117]. "Only one wall of the castle remains standing but the sheela is in a nearly perfect state, having been re-erected on the gable wall of an out-house ... the oddest feature about the figure is that she has been painted red". Whilst they state that it is a very well preserved example with all the finer details of the carving and of the highly decorative nature of the dressing marks on the stone clearly preserved, they do not give a full description, and their drawing is not particularly accurate.</p>
	Other information / comments	The present owner said that she had been told there were originally 4 sheelas on the castle, but she didn't know if this was true or not.


9.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Blackhall Castle / Map 55. N 797022 Kildare In a private garden 20 July 2000 Tower house originally, but now ex-situ Originally on W facing wall of castle, to far right of doorway Originally c. 5' Primary (now ex-situ) Sheela is limestone, different stone for main building.	
	Description of sheela	Sheela carved onto a block 26" long x 12" wide x 15" deep. The figure is c. 18" tall and nearly as wide as the block. Head: very round, large. Smile on face. Neck: clearly shown. Arms: both behind legs with hands entering vulva. Ribs: clearly shown. Breasts: small, round. Very broad shoulders. Legs: apart and turned outwards at knees, with feet outwards too. Toes very clear on her right foot. No hair. Vulva: hanging below legs, not naturalistic.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	None	
	Architectural history	C15th tower house in private grounds of later house, currently occupied. A substantial portion of the tower house collapsed, including the W doorway and wall with sheela on it, in December 1998. The owners [Jeffrey & Naomi White] have kept the sheela, which remained in tact.	
	Referred to by other authors	a) 1896-99. <i>Journal of the Co. Kildare Archaeological Society</i> , 2: 330. b) <u>Guest</u> : [1936: 111, No. 14 & fig. 8]: "One mile south-west of Calverstown, which is between Kilcullen and Ballitore. The figure is carved on a slab on the peel tower and faces west-south-west. Type 1(a)." No references. c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 146]: With photograph (still in situ). "1.5 km. SW of Calverstown, Narraghmore, between Kilcullen and Ballitore. The peel tower of this 13 th century castle (later alterations) stands by itself, now within a farm, and in the wall by the doorway is a standing female figure, set in brickwork of recent date. It is carved in low relief, with a	

		<p>round, bald head, broad shoulders and arms, and hands passed below the thighs, joining in a gesture below the abdomen. Indication of lean ribs.” Reference to Guest [1936] only.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.160]; on distribution map [p.127], class 1; in List B, Ireland [p.118]. Line drawing [p.12].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: In Roberts’ 1997 map, with appalling directions. In his 1995 guide with similar directions, and a reference to the tower house being C13th. Tries to link the Blackhall sheela with Dun Aillinne (Hill of Allen), ancient capital of Leinster and named after the goddess Aillinne). Says Dun Aillinne is closely associated with Brigit. Dun Aillinne is, he says, 2 miles south of Kilcullen. Drawings in both.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 118]: Quite a different entry! Blackhall Castle is about ten kilometres south of Kilcullen and about two kilometres north of Narraghmore. The Sheela-na-Gig has been set in stonework of recent origin by the doorway of the peel tower of the thirteenth-century castle which faces south-west. It has a groove around the head similar to the Clenagh castle figure and her right leg is slightly raised. It appears as if both hands pass under the thighs and are joined below the abdomen.” There is no mention of Dun Aillinne or links with Brigit. Also, if they visited this sheela, they must have done so before Christmas 1998 and not since, due to the castle wall with the sheela on it collapsing then [see my notes above].</p>
	Other information / comments	Newbridge Library has info. re: the history of Blackhall Castle [the Eustace family]


10	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Bunratty Castle / Map 58. Clare 25 July 2000 Tower house Interior, in the Great Hall, to left of a S.-facing window c. 5'. Stone slab measures c.20" x c. 14" Secondary ? Sheela probably not limestone	
	Description of sheela	Carved in bas-relief. Head: almost skull-like. Eyes: slightly at an angle (inner eye downwards, outer eye upwards). Almond-shaped eyes with brow ridges. Nose: square & may have been damaged at tip. Mouth area juts out from face. Mouth: rectangular, open, with upper & lower teeth depicted; 5 peg-like teeth in each jaw. Neck: small and narrow. Arms: come out from shoulders in an arc down behind the legs, with hands curled round into vulva. Fingers depicted on her left hand: 4 fingers + thumb. Legs: widely splayed at an almost right-angle to the body. Feet: facing outwards to sides, away from the body. Possible indication of toes on her left foot. Breasts: present. Quite rounded shape with her left breast slightly larger than her right. Vulva: depicted well below groin area i.e. not at all naturalistic. Very deep groove for vulva. Beneath vulva and below where the hands are going in, there's a distinct hole indicating an anus . Damage to lower arm on her right side.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	To sheela's left and above is another sculpted stone – like a coat of arms or a depiction of a building.	
	Architectural history	The sheela was removed to its present position from a window in the tower (interior) when Bunratty Castle was renovated (?1960s). Don't know if tower position was original or not.	
	Other features		
	Topography		

Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Leask, H.G.</u> 1936. <i>JRSAI</i>, 66: 313.</p> <p>b) <u>Wallace, J.N.A.</u> 1936-39. 'Sheela-na-gig at Bunratty Castle, Co. Clare', <i>North Munster Antiquarian Journal</i>, 1: 39.</p> <p>c) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Hunt, J., and Lynch, C.</u> 1964. <i>Bunratty Castle, Co. Clare</i>, p.8. [Ref. from Andersen]</p> <p>e) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 146]: "A figure set by a S. window in the hall of the great keep ... The figure is seated, with widely splayed knees, hands joined below the thighs around a slit of pudenda (not correct). The arms make up a near circle, the breasts are small, the head is triangular on top of a narrow neck. Eyes set in hollow sockets, and a set of teeth incised." Andersen also attributes to John Hunt information regarding the present placement of this sheela, that it originally came from an inner reveal of a window at the top of the SW tower, which dates from first half of C17th. [p.114-116]: John Hunt was, says Andersen, largely responsible for the renovation and furnishing of Bunratty castle, and also removed the sheela from its previous position "as a building stone in the inner reveal of a window at the top of the south west tower" [this is quoted from a letter by John Hunt to Andersen]. Andersen does not say when the sheela was removed to its new position. A date suggested for the sheela comes from the same letter: "As it was re-used as a building stone, and the tower it came from is first half 17th century, it might be any time before this date. Myself, I lean towards a date between 1300 and 1500." Andersen also suggests that the Clenagh castle sheela and the Bunratty sheela are related, in that the carver for the Clenagh sheela took the Bunratty one as his model. This appears to be on the basis of the position of the legs, which Andersen sees as 'bridge-like' for both figures.</p> <p>f) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: List in gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.127], class 1; Listed in List B, Ireland, with photograph [p.118].</p> <p>g) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 26]: states "this is a very demonstrative and not very handsome sheela but carved in a symbolically circular geometric form". With (poor) drawing.</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 118-119]: "The Sheela-na-Gig was originally at the top of the seventeenth-century south-west tower, on the inner reveal of a window. During restoration it was set into the wall of the Hall of the Great Keep. She appears to be a late example depicted with eyes set into hollow sockets, bared teeth and widely splayed legs.</p>
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		<p>The arms pass below the legs and make up almost a full circle with the hands placed on the rim of the pudenda." State the castle was built c. 1460 and was the seat of the O'Briens, Earls of Thomond until the early C18th.</p> <p>McMahon & Roberts do not indicate why they think she is a late example, and appear to be simply re-stating what Andersen said.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>This sheela must not have been known about in 1935 or it would have been included in Guest's list [1936]. It is not listed in the FRSAI list of 1894.</p>

11	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Cashel (a) / Map 66. S 075409 Tipperary Rock of Cashel 19 July 2000 Bishops' dormitory External E wall of C15th Bishops' dormitory. You have to pass her to enter the Rock. c.25' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	Very hard to see her. Inserted horizontally with head facing S, out towards corner, 8 th quoin stone down from the top. Squatting position. Head: very large, more than a third of whole image. Round but slightly wider at top. Eyes: quite close together. Nose: Comes down from inside edge of eyes, wedge-shaped, very broad at base. Mouth: Thin line, smiling. Neck: none. Head sits on torso. No shoulders as such. Arms: come straight out from under head with elbows pointed out and up, then lower arms come in towards inner thigh area. Right hand appears to be touching vulva. Left hand looks like it is resting on her left inner thigh. Just down from the knee. Legs: Wide apart, bent at knees, with feet facing outwards. Her left foot is more complete than her right, which has the toe-half missing. Heels very close and under buttocks. Buttocks: clearly shown. Vulva: Appears to be a vertical, deeply-incised line. Breasts: none visible. Chest area generally has a lot of chisel marks.	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history	C15th building	
	Other features	Round tower C10th-C12th; Cormac's Chapel C12th (built 1127-1134); Cathedral C13th.	
	Topography	On very prominent hill	
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Guest</u> : Not in b) <u>Andersen</u> : Not in. c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> : Not in.	


		<p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: Not in Roberts' 1995 Guide, but in his 1997 map cited, incorrectly, as being "a figure in the cathedral".</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 120-121]: With drawing. "A reclining Sheela-na-Gig is carved on a quoin stone on the south-east corner of the Hall of the Vicar's Choral on the Rock of Cashel ... The Rock of Cashel was a place of religious and political importance, the royal residence of the Kings of Munster until AD 1101 when King Muirchertach O'Brien handed it over to the Church. The figure can be described as squatting and the hands ... reach down from broad shoulders towards the slit of the vulva."</p>
	Other information / comments	

12	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Cashel (b) / Map 66. S 075409 Tipperary Rock of Cashel 19 July 2000 In the museum at the Rock Ex-situ Not relevant Ex-situ Unsure	
	Description of sheela	Female figure on stone with mask-like face and long legs which interlace twice. Very rotund belly and breasts. Large open mouth. Not a sheela, in my opinion.	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Lawlor, H.C.</u> [1932: 44-45]: With photograph [fig. 3]. 'Two more Irish "Sheela-na-Gigs"', <i>Man</i>, 32. States this figure was "dug up near the round tower ... and can there be seen. [It] is equally quaint and hideous, but has no sexual characteristic. It is usually described as a Sheela-na-gig, but lacking anything of the "fertility" idea I should not be inclined to include it in this category. It is also called the "Evil Eye Stone" Apparently the Cashel figure, with twisted legs, has a moustache ... ".</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 114]: Photograph (facing p. 115), fig. 15. "This figure is on a detached stone preserved in the Cathedral, and is atypical. It is without arms and has entwined legs, which may indicate affinity with Jacobean sculpture. It is said to be an 'Evil Eye Stone' by the writer in <i>Man</i>, 1932, p.44."</p> <p>[facing p. 115, Pl. XI, fig. 15]: Photograph.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977]: Not in gazetteer. [p. 118]: Says this figure "seems to show some evolution of the sheela motif towards a more generalized fierce female, an armless woman with crossed, or rather twisted, legs, a fat belly, and poignant breasts. There is no reference to the genitals, but the facial features are reminiscent of the early tradition of tattooing or rather disfiguring the face by</p>	

		<p>incision. On the Cashel figure it results in a strange cat-like appearance.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 23]: Cited as being C17th & from a window in the “large church”. [1997: Illustrated map]: Classes the figure as a sheela, cited (incorrectly) as being “in church on the Rock of Cashel”.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 121]: “In 1840, O’Donovan referred to a Sheela here as ‘The Idol’, but may well have been referring to a figure with a cat-like head, rotund belly and intertwining legs known also as the ‘Cat Goddess’ that was previously regarded as a Sheela and can now be seen within the museum.”</p>
	Other information / comments	


13	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building</p> <p>Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Cashel (c) / Map 66. S 076405 Tipperary In a hotel 23 July 2000 Cashel Palace Hotel Completely ex-situ, on wall in the corridor by the Buttery/Guinness Bar. Displayed as a piece of art in an alcove, with a rubbing of it displayed in next alcove. Not relevant Ex-situ Limestone</p>	 
	Description of sheela	<p>The block of stone she is on is c.2' high x 1' wide x 6" deep. Head: round with bald top, with a more pointed than rounded chin. Ears: very large, like the letter 'C', halfway down the head. Eyes: quite close-set. Nose: triangular-shaped. Part of the stone beneath is missing which makes the mouth look like it's smiling & larger than it would have been. Arms: coming out from the body almost at right-angles, bent in again at the elbows with hands coming down in front of the body to vulva. Breasts: her right is much smaller than her left, which is longer & pendulous. Legs: difficult to make out clearly but appears to be thighs at the bottom of the stone, with lower part of legs and feet not being shown.</p> <p>The rubbing shows a different impression: breasts shown the same size & shape; it doesn't show the arms so well, which you can clearly see on the original coming out at almost right-angles. The artist of the rubbing has added a right-side to the neck.</p>	
	Other features	<p>The info. panel with these 2 images says: " Sheela na Gig. C11th-C14th mythological female figure displaying or calling attention to anatomical features. Often found in churches or ecclesiastical buildings. These medieval sheela's have varying stories as to their origins. Witch or preacher, hag or healer, fertility symbol or whore ... whichever story one chooses to believe, these carved stones add yet another dimension to the mysteries of Ireland's cultural past."</p> <p>The rubbing was done in 1995.</p>	

	Topography	Not relevant
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: Not in</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Counihan, Monica</u>: [1992: 230]: “This building [Cashel Palace Hotel] was originally built by Archbishop Bolton in the 18th century and served as his palace. At the back of the building on the boiler-house of brick and stone and near the oil-tanks, is a limestone quoin stone, about five feet up from the rock foundation, on which there is an evenly worn sheela-na-gig, measuring 56x30 cm, flatly carved and difficult to see ... She has very large ears, is apparently bald, with open mouth pendular breasts, arms over thighs and detailed vulva. She appears to have been cut down from a larger stone; the top of her head is just cut off. So are her left leg above the knee and her right foot.” Counihan says this sheela is stylistically quite different from the sheela on the Vicar’s Choral building.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995, 1997]: Not in</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001]: Not in</p>
	Other information / comments	I discovered the existence of this sheela from a local person with whom I struck up a conversation, later finding out about Counihan’s article.


14	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location</p> <p>Date visited Building type Location within building</p> <p>Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Castlemagner well / Map 73. R 444019 Cork</p> <p>A holy well with associated stone-built well-house, located in a field. Not easily found.</p> <p>5th September 2001</p> <p>Well-house, possibly C18th.</p> <p>The 'sheela' is on the E wall of the well-house, to the left of the entrance.</p> <p>At ground level</p> <p>Secondary</p> <p>Limestone</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>Looks more like a 'deity' figure than a sheela. 21.5" tall from top of the head to the ground, and 12" wide at the widest part (between the outstretched hands). The legs are broken off at just below the knees. Head: in proportion to body, very round. Ears: none. Eyes: oval and open with pupils clearly visible. The eyebrow ridges follow on from their outer edge to become the outside of the nose. Nose: lower part is broken. Mouth: no expression. Lips apart. Neck: clearly shown. Arms: held above body at either side of head; palms facing outwards. All fingers and both thumbs shown. Breasts: clearly visible. Possibly 'sagging', but face does not correspond with representation of older woman. 'Pear-shaped' figure with very wide hips and thighs – not a 'typical' sheela-shape at all. Legs: slightly apart, and straight. Belly: quite round - ? pregnant. Belly-button: represented lower than natural position. Very clearly shown as an incised circle with the centre hollowed out. 2cm below this, there is a wide 'V' shape with a very clearly carved 'V' below to denote the genitals, but no vulva is shown. It is a polite rendition of female genitalia – clearly shown but not explicit. The figure has lightly incised (later additions) crosses on her forehead, both hands, and sternum.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>To the right of the well entrance is another figure, smaller than the 'sheela', carved in relief on a roundel. Badly inserted (quite rough cementing); appears to be of a Roman centurion. This figure also looks as though it has breasts, but it may be a breastplate. The figure looks more male than female due to the clothing, muscley legs, and a very large lower jaw /left cheek.</p>	

		The arms are quite thin though, and do not 'match' the legs. There is something tied around his left leg, half way down the calf. His right hand is pointing to the right, with a short sleeve visible. Possible feather head-dress. Also possible sword going across his body from his right to left, and a raised band going around his midriff just below 'breasts'. Chunky neck. His left arm is bent, outwards, at the elbow, with the hand placed on his left hip, fingers pointing down in line with the leg. His skirt is just above the knee. There is a long cloak shown falling to the rear and to his right, in folds. He has fat lips, small eyes, a damaged nose, left ear only visible, and is small. His head is turned to his right, with his left side of face in profile.
	Architectural history	The well-house is roughly circular. It has two entrances, W and E sides, and a corbelled roof. It entirely surrounds the well. Present height of E facing well-entrance is 1'7.5" tall x 20" wide.
	Other features	Above the well is a lintel on which is inscribed: 'Owen Egan of Knucknanuss erected this in honour of God and Bl.... [cannot make out the inscription here] AD 1787'. This dates the lintel, and probably the well-house, but not the 'sheela', which like the 'Roman centurion' has come from another place.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 115]: "(called 'Banteer' in the JRSAL List). The figure is on a slab flanking the doorway of a holy well about half a mile west of Castlemagner, in a field on the north side of the road to Cecilstown, and on the bank of the Catra stream. It is nude, with hands raised and legs terminating immediately below the flexed knees. The sex is indicated less crudely than in other figures, and if Du Noyer is right in dating it to the seventeenth century, it may be an adaptation of the sheela-na-gig idea by a more conventional age. On the opposite side of the doorway is a small figure resembling a Roman soldier." References: Du Noyer, G.V., <i>Ordnance Sketches</i>, [actually, according to Andersen, <i>Sketches</i>] (RAI Library), v.2: 82; Grove-White, Col. J., 1911. <i>Historical and topographical notes on Buttevant, etc.</i>, v.2: 112-3. [facing p. 115, Pl. XI, fig. 16]: Photograph.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 146]: "8 km. ESE of Kanturk on the Mallow-Newmarket road, and 800m. west of Castlemagner on the N side of a road to Cecilstown. A path by the river Catra leads to a holy well opposite a ruined castle." Similar description to, and taken from, Guest (as above), but adds: "Scratched pebble marks, cross-shaped, on both hands, on the forehead, on the stomach above the navel, and on the thighs." References: Du Noyer, G.V. <i>Sketches</i>, v.2: 82 (in Library of Society of Antiquaries, Dublin);</p>

	<p>Grove-White (as in Guest's reference above); Guest (as above). [p.26]: 2 photographs, one from 1975 (by Weir), the other Guest's photograph (taken by Helen Roe) in 1935.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 22]: With (poor) drawing. "This figure is found at a well known Holy Well dedicated to St Brigit. It is of a similar style to the Ballyvourney sheela and she is depicted as naked but is not readily classed as a Sheela because she is not truly displaying her genitalia. However, the pubis is clearly marked and she is obviously naked. The figure falls within the category of the current list because of her similarities to the Ballyvourney figure and because of the context within which she has been placed."</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 121-2]: Put Castlemagner as being in Co. Tipperary, instead of Cork. Re-state Andersen's location (which is incorrect), and say that it is a popular holy well. Describe the figure as "standing or kneeling with her arms raised ... her face has large staring almond shaped eyes and a [sic] incised mouth. Unlike most sheelas she is not overtly emphasising her sexual organs which has led some researchers to dismiss her as a true sheela, yet the pubis is clearly marked ... The tradition of rubbing the figure with a pebble or stone has left well worn cross marks on the forehead, hands, belly and thighs. Although her whole stance and demeanour are unusual amongst the Sheela-na-Gigs the figure falls within the category of the current list because of her similarities to the Ballyvourney figure and where she has been placed. (50cmx30cm)".</p>
Other information / comments	<p>This site is extraordinarily hard to find, even with it marked on an OS map. I needed local knowledge to find it, provided by a man in his 40s, who has lived in the locality all his life. He said no-one visited the well anymore, not since he was a boy, when visits were made in May. This image is not at all like the Ballyvourney figure! The 'context' Roberts [1995] talks of must be the Holy Well siting, and he is, I think, linking the two figures on the basis of this; whilst both figures are at holy well sites, they are not sheelas because of it. Roberts' description of the location of this 'sheela' is completely inaccurate, as is his assertion [2001] that it is a popular holy well site. It is therefore quite likely that Roberts has not visited this site in person. Andersen did not visit it either [I am sure he would have taken his own photo if he had]; since Guest, I may be the first researcher to have visited it in person and recorded it accurately.</p>


15	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Cloghan castle / Map 40. M 844508 Roscommon Private farmland 10 September 2001 Ruinous tower house, aligned NW / SE Sheela is at S corner of SE facing wall on a quoin stone (16"-18" wide x 12" high) c. 30' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	Sheela is inserted horizontally. Head: Disproportionately large to rest of body being c. one third of total body length; elongated with some sort of hood. Head appears to be separate from rest of body with no neck. Eyes: very close together. Nose: long. Mouth: very pointed tongue protruding down to bottom of chin. Shoulders: quite chunky. Arms: both come down in front of groin area. Breasts: smallish, quite round, upright, pointing forwards. Torso: none as such. Hands: Cannot see fingers on hands. Vulva: is a small slit which hands appear to be above. There is some long object hanging below the vulva between the thighs, which looks as though it is coming from behind the body [defecation?]. Legs: apart with knees slightly bent and feet facing outwards; only her right foot is clearly visible, schematically-depicted as a large rectangle.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	The quoin stone the sheela is on has a notched pattern on it as do most of the other quoin stones and stones surrounding windows. Not a great deal remains of the structure so it is hard to say if there were other features, such as elaborate windows etc. Just below and to the right of the sheela is a dressed patterned stone with a round hole in it.	
	Architectural history	Possibly quite a late tower house (based on conjectural evidence of defensive features)	
	Other features	There is an extension to the rear of the castle to NW. Main doorway (much eroded) in SE facing wall. To the right of the main doorway (3'-4') is a dressed patterned stone with two round holes in it – possibly for attacking unwelcome visitors through.	

		3 surviving windows in total: 1 in SW wall, 2 in SE wall, all very narrow and thin.
	Topography	Castle is on a slight rise with fairly flat surrounding landscape.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 147]: Attributes reporting and photographing of this figure to Mr. A. Weir in 1975. Andersen calls the 'hood' a hairpiece or hair. He also says there are ribs indicated.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.126], class 3a; List B Ireland [p.118]; drawing [p.13].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 31]: "Tiny breasts with the indication of ribs ... points her hands towards the genitals and with 'protruding, hanging tongue'."</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2000: 123-4]: "Both hands gesture towards the defined vulva. The main features are a protruding tongue, a second uvula-like shape carved into the background below the genitals, and a fringe of hair or hairpiece that frames the head." They are incorrect in their description of the vulva as it is not well defined.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>This sheela is interesting in that it has possible masculine features associated with female ones (the chunky shoulders, the masculine-looking face, with breasts and vulva also depicted). The 'hood' could be some sort of helmet, or under-helmet chain-mail depiction. This 'hood' is definitely not hair or a hairpiece.</p> <p>This castle can be seen as being possibly quite defensive in a) location, and b) type of castle, with c) this particular type of 'sheela'. Almost as though the image is a mixture of ideas of 'warrior', an apotropaic-type image incorporating sheela characteristics.</p>


16	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Clomantagh castle / Map 60. S 348638 Kilkenny 16 July 2000 Tower house c.55' high from ground to battlement Exterior, S-facing wall, on SW corner. Very high up c. 45' Probably primary Local stone	
	Description of sheela	Sheela inserted sideways, facing W on outer edge of quoin. Head: Round-topped, bald, large compared to rest of body. Pointed chin. Eyes: Almond-shaped and bulbous. Appear to have eyebrows shown. Nose: Long, triangular, with nostrils shown. Mouth: Clearly shown as a straight line quite deeply incised. Neck: shown, quite long and thin. Arms: Long in relation to rest of body, and thin. Left arm: in front of body with hand touching vulva/pubis. Long, thin fingers which appear to be going into vulva; thumb shown resting at top of opening to vulva. Right arm: raised bent at elbow, hand with long, thin fingers clearly visible holding large cone-shaped object, possibly up to right ear. Ears: not visible at sheela's left side of head; there may be a right ear, although this is not at all clear. Strange long, thin stick-like object at lower left side of sheela's head. Breasts: clearly shown. Pendulous but not sagging, and quite large. Possible nipples shown. Ribs: shown beneath breasts. Legs: thin and small in relation to rest of body, bent at knees, at right angles to body. Large feet, facing out to sides, with long, straight toes. Vulva: clearly shown as a deeply chiselled out groove.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	C14th/C15th style window above and to right of sheela	
	Architectural history	Original tower house in near-complete state, excellent preservation. Been adapted into dwelling by Bord Failte & SE Tourism. Later windows added, and farmhouse extension on E wall. Older scar of gable on E wall, above present roof-line of farmhouse.	
	Other features	4 styles of window: Gothic double-light, round-headed double-light, round-headed single light, slit. Part of original tower house wall still standing, with arrow-slit window, to W of tower house; immediately behind this is the well. N wall of tower house has original doorway, courtyard behind with significant amount of original wall remaining. NW of courtyard: more recent farm	

		buildings.
	Topography	Castle is at foot of small hill to N, with a plain to the S, and more hills in distance to S. Ruined church c.150-200m. to S of tower house with no remaining sculpture, apart from one double-light ogee window? in E wall.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Carrigan, W.</u> 1905. <i>History and Antiquities of the diocese of Ossory</i>, v.2: 368.</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 117]: “The figure is said to be midway up the castle wall on the south-west angle. All is now (1935) obscured by ivy”. References: Carrigan [1905].</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 147]. Apparently this figure was revealed in 1949 when snow pulled the ivy down. No picture. The “figure of a female of large proportions is ... clearly visible on a quoin, vertically inserted on the SW angle. Although the figure is now ‘on its side’, it is carved standing, with knees splayed, and the toes turned out to rest against (even to reach beyond) the frame formed by a clearly edged niche that follows the outline of the figure. Broad shoulders and open armpits, with angular stripes in a pattern across the chest, indicating ribs. The l. hand is carved in high relief and rests above the lower abdomen.” [p.106]: Andersen says: “the figure is distinguished by its heavy shoulders and a head tightly joined to the body, leaving room for heavy cone-shapes emerging from the sides of the face like an absurd pair of flying plaits”. This presumably refers to the large triangular-shaped object as I have described above, although I could only see one such object. The other object is definitely not a cone-shape, as described above. References: Carrigan [1905], Guest [1936].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.126], class 3a; List B Ireland [p.118]; [p.12] incorrect sketch/drawing (her right hand is shown as behind her right thigh).</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: In Roberts’ 1997 map, referred to as ‘Croomantagh’. The sheela is described as being “on a corner stone of the castle which is about 4 miles from Freshford on the Kilkenny-Urlingford road”. Very similar inclusion in his 1995 guide [p.27]. No drawing in either.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 124]: “a large figure with her feet touching the edge of the quoin. Her right hand is raised up towards her face and her left hand is clearly depicted touching her pudenda. She shares a similarity to the sheela from Kiltinan church, with the same pendulous breasts and pipe-stem neck.” They incorrectly state that Andersen “mistakenly described” this sheela as “having an ‘absurd form of flying plaits’” [see</p>

		Andersen's actual description above].
	Other information / comments	


17	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building</p> <p>Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Clonmacnoise, Nuns' Chapel / Map 47. N 009307 Offaly</p> <p>26 July 2000 C12th Church Interior. 'Sheela' is on E. archway of chancel, on the side facing the nave, on 7th voussoir spandrel up, on left side of the arch. On the third order of the arch. c. 12' Primary Arch and sculptures: sandstone; rest of church: limestone.</p>	
	Description of sheela	Small figure, c. 4" long x 3" wide. The focus seems to be more on the anus than the vulva. The legs are up by the ears – a characteristic not found in sheelas. The face is smaller at the top, broadening out widely towards the chin. No arms or hands are visible. I really don't think this is a sheela. More an acrobat exhibitionist.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>The other spandrels near her are not very clear. No. 3 is some sort of animal-like head as is No. 1 (fish?), No. 2 is indistinct, No. 4 ?, Nos. 5 & 6 are damaged, 9 is a cat, 10 is another human head, 11, 12 & 13 ? On the right-hand side: No. 2 is some sort of cat, 3 is damaged, 5 is a human head.</p> <p>On column tops, middle order of both sides are Celtic-type heads [of what?]. The outer entrance, W. doorway, has chevrons on 1st and 2nd order columns, with horses' heads voussoirs (mouths round bars). No evidence of other human figs. on this doorway.</p>	
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Guest</u> : [1935:113]: "A figure cut in a lozenge on a voussoir in the outer order on the N. side of the chancel arch in the Nuns' Chapel. It consists of a grotesque but highly finished face embraced by upturned legs, and is not typical of a sheela-na-gig." Poor photograph [fig. 13].	

	<p>References: T.J. Westrop's <i>Sketches</i>, in the library of the RIA, v.3: 42 (incorrect) [Guest's parentheses].</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 147]: "The chancel of the Nuns' Church has a small figure of a woman carved as a spandrel motif on a voussoir. Various small faces and animal heads occur in similar positions as spandrel ornament on the arch, but they are all less elaborate than the acrobatic sheela, with its heels about its head." Andersen quotes Guest's last comment as below, but omits the end of the quote referring to Guest not believing it to be a sheela. [pp.37-39]: 3 photographs (none taken by Andersen).</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: No photograph or drawing. In gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.127], class 5; List B Ireland [p.118].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 28]: With (poor) drawing. Says Clonmacnoise was founded as a Christian 'settlement' in AD 548, "but was almost certainly a sacred place long before that time". He accepts the figure as a sheela.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 125-6]: With (poor) drawing. "One of the few Romanesque Sheelas in Ireland ... On the inside of the larger decorated chancel arch, the seventh voussoir from the left, is a very small figure embracing its head in the manner of the continental acrobatic figures set into a lozenge-shaped stone, and with its feet raised. Other faces and animals' heads are also set within a similar ornament on the arch ... The Nuns' Chapel ... is said to have been completed in 1167."</p>
Other information / comments	


18	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Doon Castle / Map 47. N 118316 Offaly 24 July 2000 Tower house Exterior, E wall quoin stone at E-S wall corner. Inserted horizontally. c. 15' Primary Limestone – castle & sheela	
	Description of sheela	<p>Quoin stone is 2' high x 14" wide x at least 6" deep. The sheela measures 16" high x 10" wide at broadest point. She is standing but inserted horizontally with her head facing S at edge of quoin. Head: is c. 8" diameter, with a round top and a pointed chin. Head is disproportionate to body: 50/50. Eyes: oval-shaped with eyelids and eyes clearly visible. Eyebrow ridges shown. Nose: triangular-shaped. Ears: both sides at centre of head, realistic. Her left ear is not visible from the ground, but is even more detailed in realistic description than her right. The top of the forehead has a raised band c. 1" across with incised grooves (c. 0.25" raised away from scalp) going down towards the eyes, possibly indicating hair, but more probably furrowed brow lines. The whole sheela is in bas-relief, but the head is prominent 2.5" from flat surface whilst the rest of the body is only 1.5". Mouth: deeply incised, straight line across 0.5" deep x 2" wide, with her left side of the mouth raised in almost a smirk. The area under the nose is clearly demarcated. No neck. Breasts: immediately below chin, in centre of torso, & are kidney- or heart-shaped. Each breast is 1.25" long x 0.75" wide. Ribs: marked across torso, 4 on her left, 3 or 4 on her right. Each rib is in bas-relief, 0.125" raised x 0.25" across. Shoulders: each comes out at a right-angle, but she has very rounded tops of shoulders. The angles between the shoulder & the arm, and the elbow & lower arm are quite distinct. Vulva: is a channel 0.25" deep x 0.5" long x 0.5" wide, with an incised 'U'-shaped line within it (0.5" long x 0.25" wide) going from the front to the back. Hands: Her right hand goes</p>	

		behind her right thigh & round to the front, clasping her knee area. 4 fingers are clear on inner and outer thigh, with a representation of knuckles. Her left hand is less clear, but looks like it is going behind her left leg and through clasping inner thigh. Feet: both pointed to her right (i.e. towards the ground in present position). The end of her left foot is missing; the right foot ends in a point.
	Other sculpture/decoration	No other sculpture
	Architectural history	
	Other features	<p><u>E wall:</u> Main doorway (simple, Gothic-style arch) into castle, with sheela c.35' to left of doorway (i.e. to its S.) and above it. Doorway is not centrally placed in wall; it's more to the right. The wall is very ivy-clad, but one window is visible c. 45' up nearly in centre. Large support buttress (dressed stone) from left edge of E wall to doorway. Another window is visible c. 4' above doorway to its left slightly.</p> <p><u>N wall:</u> 2 single-light ogee-headed windows. 1 earlier ogee-like window. At least 1 narrow loop window. The central ogee window has decorative work on the stone similar to the examples at Moate.</p> <p><u>W wall:</u> has garderobe and at least 2 windows. Very ivy-clad.</p> <p><u>S wall:</u> has some damage to lower part at E end, with 2 holes visible – one square, like a window with a lintel. The perimeter wall remains at a good height (c. 9') at 12' from S wall. Stairway window (narrow rectangle) and larger upper floor window.</p> <p>The castle is on a large motte with evidence of courtyard / perimeter wall.</p>
	Topography	Small stream runs at base of motte, from SE to W. Another tower house, very ruinous, lies to the S. c.300m. away.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 118]: “an atypical figure, on a quoin at the south angle of the east wall of the tower. The torso and arms seem to indicate a sheela-na-gig.” Photograph [fig. 23].</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 147]: “A figure at the S angle of the E wall of the early tower, carved as standing, but fitted in vertically as a quoin. Big head, straight legs, arms joined in a downward pointed gesture, with the r. hand passed behind the thigh. Breasts slightly indicated, abdomen now very worn and weathered.” Reference: Guest (as above).</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.127], class 1; List B Ireland [p.118]; (poor) line drawing [p.12].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 28]: (Poor) drawing, i.e. head is too small, only one ear (her right) shown,</p>


		<p>and her left hand is in wrong position. "She is depicted in a standing position but the stone is set on its side to the left of the main entrance as a corner stone."</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 128-9]: "This is a well-preserved Sheela, carved as standing but found in a reclining position on a quoin stone on the south-east corner of the tower a short way to the left of the main entrance. The right hand passes underneath the thigh and the left hand passes over the thigh. The legs are carved as standing but both feet point towards the right."</p>
	Other information / comments	Is this a tower house or an earlier Anglo-Norman building?

19	<p>Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location</p> <p>Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Dunnaman castle / Map 65. R 473422 Limerick Tower house incorporated into semi-derelict farm buildings still being used for animals. 8 September 2001 Tower house On E wall, above and to left of main doorway. 35' – 40' Primary Sheela is carved from a limestone block c. 2' x 2' square.</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>Sheela is carved in relief. Head: disproportionately large to rest of body, being c. one third of total body length. Very large right ear. Two rows of furrowed lines on brow. Her left ear not visible anymore (damaged). Eyes: almond-shaped, closed. Nose: Long, wide. Mouth: deeply incised, not open, with slight smile. Neck: none. Arms: Her right arm comes out away from torso and goes under right thigh. Left arm similarly. Her left shoulder has a strange extra piece to it almost like a tongue. Could the sculptor have made a mistake? Or does it represent something else? Breasts: Lemon-shaped, coming out towards sides under arms, with nipples clearly visible. Ribs: indicated with many striation lines. Legs: stylised, wide apart. Knees not really shown, more hinted at. Feet: facing outwards, toes clearly visible particularly on her left foot. Hands: large with fingers going into open vulva which hangs below groin area.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>To the sheela's immediate left is a large single-light ogee-headed window with several lines of chamfering and hood-moulding with pattern. Below this is another smaller single-light ogee-headed window with hood-moulding and a seven-petalled rose at one side of hood-moulding, and another foliate pattern within a square. Main doorway is a simple arch Gothic style with the squints, as at Tullavin, to left and above door. N wall: has 3 surviving single-light ogee-headed windows, the two top ones with simple pattern either side at the tops. Small rectangular slit window to bottom left of wall, and another overgrown small single-light ogee-headed window at bottom right. W wall: has 2 surviving single-light ogee-headed windows</p>	

		and lower hole where a third had been, all nearly in line in centre of wall. S wall: has 1 surviving single-light ogee-headed window, with possible second one above it covered in ivy, and 3 slit plain windows.
	Architectural history	
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 112]: "The figure is on a slab, high up on the peel tower, and now hidden by ivy." Type 1a. Drawing [Fig. 9, facing p. 113]. References: Lord Dunraven, <i>Memorials of Adare</i>, p.202 with illustration [Guest's Fig. 9]; <i>JRSAI</i>, 1874, 13: 17; <i>PRIA</i>, 1906, 26: 167.</p> <p>a) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 148]: With photograph. "A figure on a slab, set high up on the wall of a peel tower, now adjoining farm buildings and approached through farmyard. Obscured, but only in part by ivy. Posture standing, with legs splayed widely, allowing room for the hands to pass beneath the thighs in a gesture around the slit of pudenda. Broad shoulders and open armpits, flat breasts, incised ribs, with semi-circular incision to show inner lines of ribs. Large hands and large feet, with broad toes fitted into the framing niche around the carved figure." Description quite accurate apart from stating "flat" breasts and does not mention head size. Refers [p.103] to Lord Dunraven's book [1875] on Adare which has illustration showing the figure in the same position. Dunraven describes the sheela as "representing the female figure in the most repulsive way" [1875: 200-01].</p> <p>b) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]; in distribution map [p.126], class 1; in List B Ireland [p.118], with black and white plate opposite.</p> <p>c) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 25]: "The castle is now in ruins and the figure may be obscured by ivy." Clearly, at this point, Roberts had not been to visit this sheela.</p> <p>d) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 129-30]: Incorrectly state the sheela is on the south-facing wall. Also say there is a "strange uvula-like shape below the actual vulva". Looking at my slide of the figure and from my observation, there is no such shape visible, and, indeed, there is not enough space for there to be such a shape.</p>
	Other information / comments	Generally, the castle is being badly neglected, with farm-related chemicals, and empty containers surrounding it, as well as general farm rubbish. I would say that this castle is of quite high status because of the sculptural embellishment of windows, and the flower and foliate designs. The sheela, too, is part of this declaration of status. She is meant to be seen.


20	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Fethard Abbey / Map 67. S 212349 Tipperary To SE of the town 17 July 2000 Abbey (built AD 1305) N-facing exterior wall, adjacent to E end of church c. 4.5' Secondary Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	c. 2' high. Almost a voussoir shape. Feeling behind the stone, it has been deliberately shaped and could definitely have come from a doorway or window. Some striation indicating possible ribs. Legs straight down, no evidence of genitals. R/h arm missing, l/h arm goes across body touching the lower stomach just below navel. In my view, the figure looks male, based on facial countenance. But no evidence for this, so it must therefore be classed as androgynous . Large Celtic-style/ Romanesque ears.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Nearby to W of 'sheela' is a double-light ogee headed window with foliate designs above and to each side. Above this is a more recent window. There is another head, on a later extension of the abbey (now the vestry) which is medieval. Inside the abbey there are Romanesque stone carvings of heads on the chancel arches.	
	Architectural history	Abbey dates from 1305. The wall the 'sean' is inserted into looks later than the original abbey. It abuts the main abbey wall at the E end, linking the abbey wall to the presbytery house wall, with a garden the other side.	
	Other features		
	Topography	The abbey is to the SE of the town, close to the main streets.	
	Referred to by other authors	a) <i>JCHAS</i> , 1903, 9: 206, with illustration (Guest: 119); <i>JCHAS</i> , 1903, 9: 207-8 (Andersen). b) <i>Guest</i> : [1936: 118-9]: In her additional list of sheelas from her own fieldwork (i.e. not in	


		<p>the JRSAL list of 1894). “The figure is inserted in the north face of the wall extending eastward of the east end of the church. It has been classed as a sheela-na-gig, but is not typical”. Guest suggests that “alterations” may have been made to the lower abdominal region. Photograph [fig. 27, Pl. XIII, facing p.119]. References: JCHAS, 1903, 9: 206, with illustration.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 148]: “The sex of the figure is not clearly indicated ... but it is presumably female.” Photo [p.86]: “lean ribs indicated by incision, lines across the forehead, and streaking or tattooing down the cheeks.” Andersen says the figure looks “deceptively like a continuation of the pagan and early Christian tradition of the ‘big heads’ in figural representation” with “pagan-looking streaking of the cheek”.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: Listed in Gazetteer [p.161]; on distribution map [p.126], class 4 [this is conjecture as the ‘pudenda’ and arm that might have been indicating or touching it are not shown]; List B Ireland [p.118].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 24]: “several features point to it having been originally erected upon the earliest church at the abbey”. This may be true as I noted that the stone upon which this figure is carved is voussoir-like. <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 131]: Their description is limited, mentioning signs of ribs and streaked cheeks, prominent asymmetrical ears. They do not think that “her lower regions have been hacked at, as is sometimes suggested, although the right hand appears to be missing”.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>Cannot be described as a definite sheela-na-gig. It could, of course, not be a sheela type at all, but something else. It cannot be described even as an exhibitionist as there is nothing being exhibited. The best that can be said is that it is an androgynous figure, which may have had genitalia.</p>

21	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Fethard town / Map 67. S 209348 Tipperary On old town wall, to S of town 17 July 2000 Old town wall, extant height c.23' Sheela is on the r/h side as you enter the town through the old town wall, facing the bridge and the river Clashawley. This may be the original entrance into the town, at least from the S. c.10' Secondary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	<p>The image is c.2' tall. Head: a third to a half the size of whole body. Oval shape, with deep carving on sides of face of inverted 'V' shape and parallel lines to neck; at neck lines become vertical. Eyes: quite large, lozenge-shaped, with outer eye carved in relief, and eyeball represented with a carved-out circle for pupil. Eyes are a feature of this sheela, although her left is better preserved than her right. Nose: badly damaged. Mouth: open, rectangular, with teeth showing from upper mandible only. Shoulders: not clear as damage to sides of the figure. Torso: is the largest feature of the image. Ribs: clearly shown: 6 to her left, 6 or 7 to her right. Breasts: not evident. Belly button: clearly represented at centre of torso. Belly: appears distended. Pregnant / giving birth? Legs: disproportionately tiny compared to rest of body. Wide apart and up to sides of body. Buttocks: indicated. Feet: no longer visible due to damage. Arms: not much left of them, but lower arms go under legs from behind and underneath buttocks, with hands both going into vulva. Fingers represented on both hands, although those on her right hand are better preserved. Vulva: not particularly clear, and certainly not the main focus of this sheela. There is an indentation where the hands go into the vulva, but vulva as such is not explicit.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	To sheela's right, c.15' away, is an arrow slit window. No other features on wall.	
	Architectural history	Medieval town wall.	
	Other features	To the immediate W of the wall sheela is on, is a tower house and to the W of this a ruined	

		church and other buildings associated with the medieval town wall. There's a more recent, intact church to the W of ruined one.
	Topography	Edge of town, just over the river
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 111]: "In the gable end of a ruined cottage between the Abbey and the bridge over the Clashawley river ... there are some unusual chevron markings on the face and on the right side of the head something that may be hair, or perhaps a large ear". Type 1b.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 148]: Says the wall is part of the medieval town wall, which now protects a farmyard but is still known as 'Old Wall'. He sees the positioning of the sheela on this "original part of the defences of the town [placed] as if ... in a position to overlook the bridge and the approach to the town". Photo [p.85].</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161, as 'Fethard']; on distribution map [p.126], class 1; List B Ireland [p.118]. Photo [p.118].</p> <p>d) <u>O'Connor, James</u>: [1991: 13]: Says the figure is "wonderfully sited as a guardian figure overlooking a bridge on the Clashawley river", and that Watergate is the name of the area today, but in the 1840s map it was called Water Street and the wall then also had a turret. But he does not mention whether the sheela was actually on the wall at this time.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 24]: No description; location given; refers to Andersen calling this figure 'the witch on the wall' and hence the name for his book; very poor drawing of the figure.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 131-2]: Say the figure blends in with the wall although it is so strategically placed facing the old entry into the town. "The hands meet below the thighs and the fingers are joined in the opening of the vulva. This sheela is one of the few examples that could be described as ugly", they say, "as she has an emaciated look, incised ribs, an incised, striated chevron pattern on the left cheek, striations on her neck, and a large growth on her right ear. Grimly set teeth and large, rimmed staring eyes with pupils add to her hideous appearance". They refer to O'Connor's booklet [1991] where he says "it must be one of the most powerfully apotropaic of all the Sheela figures" [O'Connor 1991: 13].</p>
	Other information / comments	Has this sheela been moved since 1935? Guest describes it as being in the gable end of a cottage; it is now definitely on the old town wall, which does not look as though it has been a gable end of a cottage. Andersen dismisses Guest's description as 'insufficient', but perhaps she was being accurate (her usual method).


		Pregnant / giving birth? Striations on neck reminiscent of Taghmon sheela, and similarly could be representative of grimacing during childbirth. Eyes a feature too. Thus, possible eye / birthing connection. [Cf. Gravel 1995]
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22	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Holycross Abbey / Map 66. S 090543 Tipperary 19 July 2000 Abbey S facing cellar wall (later than earlier abbey ruins) c.14' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	Badly denuded, or defaced, particularly around genital area. Flat-topped head, large, rounded abdomen.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Double-light ogee-headed window to sheela's left.	
	Architectural history	Founded in C12th. See Holycross Abbey booklets	
	Other features	See Holycross Abbey booklets	
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Guest</u> : Not in b) <u>Andersen</u> : [1977: 149]: with photograph. Says it was discovered in 1970. "It is nearly hacked away but discernible about 2.7m. up on a wall of the W range facing the road and the parish priest's house, on the same side as the entrance to the cloister." c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> : Not in. d) <u>Roberts</u> : In Roberts' 1997 map, incorrectly located as being "in wall of old foundations on west side of the Abbey". Similar inclusion in his 1997 guide, but also adds it has been "badly damaged or 'hacked away'". No drawings in either. e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> : [2001: 133]: no drawing. Repeat what Andersen says, with location now given as "on the south wall of the west range about two and a half metres from the ground, on the same side as the entrance to the cloister."	
	Other information / comments	Roberts has given a completely incorrect location for this sheela; Andersen's location is misleading.	

23	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Brigid's Cathedral, Kildare / Map 55. N 728125 Kildare 21 July 2000 Cathedral On a C16th tomb of a Bishop (Wellesley) within the cathedral c. 3' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	<p>Very unlikely to be a sheela at all, in my opinion. It is more like a cherubic image. On under-sill at S & W corner of tomb, she is 3" tall x 5" wide. She has hair, small breasts, distended stomach / lower belly. There is a line going across beneath the belly button, beneath which are 2 'U' shapes, almost like fish or serpents. No indication of a vulva. She is holding onto her feet, legs splayed outwards at the knees, knees bent up and outwards. Large thighs. A 'pear-shaped' figure. This is opposite of most sheelas, which tend to have larger upper bodies and thin legs, with very distinctive vulvas.</p> <p>Lower abdomen being distended could be indication of pregnancy.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>To the figure's right, along the W under-sill, is another cherub-like image: head only, with very similar hair & foliage/flowers coming from mouth. Below this, on W side of tomb, are 2 panels: one of a bishop, & one of a saint or priest (has chalice in left hand). Below the priest (which is the nearer to the 'sheela' figure), & beneath the border rim, is an amphaesbaena (dragon with flowers at end of tail & entwined with foliage coming from mouth).</p> <p>To 'sheela's' left, & at centre of S. under-sill, are 2 more figures: the left one is another cherub-like figure, with breasts, & is almost horizontal; to its right is a more male-like figure with its head turned to the front, but the body sideways, (i.e. it is looking over its left shoulder to the front), with legs stretched out in front, back arched & left arm stretched out to front</p>	

		<p>too. There is a piece of stone c. 1" wide missing from between these 2 figures, so you cannot see exactly what the relationship is between them, if any. They are at close proximity, if nothing else.</p> <p>On opposite under-sill corner to the 'sheela' (i.e. E & W corner) is a ? demon's head with tongue sticking out. This corner has been broken and repaired badly.</p> <p>Religious figures on the panels on N side of tomb. S side has an 'Ecce homo' (Christ bound before Pilate), E side has the Crucifixion.</p> <p>Some Celtic interlacing patterns on W facing side of tomb, but not on E side.</p>
	Architectural history	<p>The tomb itself is of Walter Wellesley, prior of Great Connell and Bishop of Kildare (d. 1539). The tomb was removed in 1971 from the ruined site of Great Connell priory by the Co. Kildare Archaeological Society, with funds provided by Gerald Wellesley, 7th Duke of Wellington.</p>
	Other features	<p>Round tower (limestone) to SW of cathedral, with earlier granite first tower base visible. To the E of this is the recently restored site of St Brigid's firehouse or fire -temple (a sacred, perpetual fire, extinguished in C16th), which may have originated in the pre-Christian period. At SW end of cathedral are the remains of the high cross of Kildare.</p>
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 149]: attributes the discovery & identification of this figure as a sheela to John Hunt [1974]. Large photograph [p.119]. Caption with the photo says: "Obviously a late, decorative idea of a 'sheela', discreetly placed, and not a very serious 'protector' of the Bishop on his last journey.</p> <p>References: Hunt, J. 1974. <u>Irish medieval figure sculpture, 1200-1600</u>: 162; <u>JKAS</u>, 1975-6, 15: 490-2.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: Roberts locates the figure, incorrectly, in his 1997 map: "this later figure adorns the Crypt in Great Connel Abbey, in Kildare town". Oddly, his (earlier) Guide [1995: 29 with poor drawing] is more accurate in stating "the funerary monument is now in the cathedral".</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 133-4]: Say the sheela is "conceived of in a much lighter vein, being carved in a much more naturalistic manner, with the decorative treatment of her pubic hair and lack of explicit reference to her genitals. The funerary monument is</p>


		thought to have been carved in 1539 and is now in St Brigit's cathedral."
	Other information / comments	

24	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Killinaboy / Map 51. R 275917 Co. Clare 25 July 2000 Ruined church Exterior, above round-arched doorway on S. side 10' ? primary Sheela is limestone	
	Description of sheela	The image is proud of the wall, 24"-26" long and 12" wide at widest part. Head: round, oval-shaped. Fairly in proportion to body, although slightly larger than natural. Ears: flat to sides of head. Eyes: quite close-set. Nose: long, triangular-shaped with nostrils. Mouth: area more pronounced, although hard to discern mouth shape as it's quite denuded. Chin: quite well-defined (i.e. chiselled out between lips and chin). Neck: with vertical grooves. Breasts: small, pert. Shoulders: quite broad. Arms: Hard to make out whether her right arm is going behind or over thigh. Her left arm clearly is visible going over her thigh to the vulva. Both hands appear to be touching the outer part of the vulva. Right arm is most likely going over thigh. Knees: bent. Legs: apart. Feet: facing outwards away from body. Right foot no longer there. Vulva: very clearly shown, and appears to be hanging down below the body between the legs.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	There is a piece of Romanesque sculpted stone on the interior W. side of the S. doorway (to the right as you are looking at it), exposed from under the mortar covering the wall.	
	Architectural history	Base of round tower in grounds of church to NE. Earlier monastic site?	
	Other features	E. end window – later Gothic, i.e. triple ogee-headed, but earlier round-arched window on inside. On S. wall to left (W.) of doorway is an early simple slit window. In outer W. wall, the shape of a large cross is marked out in the stonework. N. wall is all exposed original stonework. N. wall has 2 antae: right of centre and at centre. To E. end of N. wall is a large	

		<p>plain rectangular window, and at ground level, far left, an arched niche with older archway above it filled in. E. end exterior wall has triple ogee-headed window.</p> <p>S. wall: exterior to right (E.) of round-arched doorway has 2 Gothic-style arched windows. The whole wall is covered with some mortar-like substance.</p>
	Topography	<p>Church located on hill with good views. To S.W. is a large ruined building c. 300m. away. River to W. side running to S.</p>
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1935:115] "The figure is outside the S. wall of the church over a round-headed doorway and is known as St. Inghean Bhaoith (daughter of Baoth), the otherwise anonymous first abbess."</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 149]: "Above round-headed doorway in S. wall of old church, showing a mixture of C11th & C12th remains, & later work. The monastic site, marked by the church, is named after St. Inghean Bhaoith, founder & first abbess, & the figure above the door has been known under her name. Standing, with knees splayed & feet turned out, hands above thighs joined in gesture towards the lower abdomen. Round bald head, grim mouth, incision of ribs, & lean neck indicated (?) by incised folds."</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986]: In gazetteer [p. 162]; on distribution map [p.127], class 3b; but omitted from List B Ireland [p.118]. No photo or drawing.</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 26]: "The C11th or C12th church here was built on the site of an early monastery founded by St. Inghean Bhaoithe. Near the church is the stump of the round tower which formerly announced the importance of this sacred centre. The sheela-na-gig is quite a large example, carved in a deep relief and most prominently displayed above the entrance door to the church. The figure was known locally as Baoith. St. Baoithe would have been a very highly regarded personage since she took her name from the greatest of the pre-historic Goddesses, the Cow Goddess Boand. This would have been a most important site."</p>
	Other information / comments	


25	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Kiltinan church / Tipperary 17 July 2000 C14th Church, with (?) defensive tower at E end Was on W end wall of church, on quoin at junction with S wall. c.10' above ground level of raised churchyard. Was primary Limestone	No image available
	Description of sheela	Sheela no longer on church as stolen in 1990	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history		
	Other features	Old bank to S of church, runs behind graveyard in straight line W-E, following to E it leads to Kiltinane Castle, 500m away.	
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 119]. (In her additional list of sheelas from her own fieldwork, not in 1894 list.) "The figure is horizontal, on a quoin of a south angle of the west wall of the ruined church: the upper side is much weathered". Earlier references cited: O'Donovan, 1840. Ordnance Survey letters, II, Typed copy, p.152; PRIA, ii, 1840-44, p.571; JRSAI, 39, 1909: 278; JRSAI, 41, 1911: 387.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: [1977: 149] "The figure in the church is carved on a large, rectangular slab, applied horizontally as a quoin in the S angle of the W wall of the church. Standing posture, with knees widely splayed, and one hand (the 'upper' hand [her left hand]) raised to the head. Turnip-shaped head set on a thin neck, flat breasts. The 'lower' hand [i.e. her right] is very large, with fingers spreading fan-wise towards the slit of pudenda very clearly shown." Very clear photo of this sheela [p.106] taken by Andersen himself.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Listed in Gazetteer [p.162]; on distribution map [p.126] classified as a figure "with one hand either touching or indicating the pudenda"; not in List B Ireland [p.118]; no picture.</p>	

		<p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 23] Booklet: States the figure was stolen in 1990, and “subsequently replaced by a replica carved by James O’Connor from photographs and other details”. This is rather misleading as it suggests the replica is in situ at the church, which it is not. Comments that the figure appears to be “dancing (doing a jig?) with her left arm and left leg uplifted and her right hand holding open the vagina. The genitals are clearly visible.”</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 136-7]: Say this figure was the first to be described by O’Donovan and from which the name entered into common usage. [This differs from Andersen’s and Guest’s view that it was the Rochestown sheela that was the first to be so called.] As well as suggesting she may be dancing, they say she had two nipples on her left breast. [How were they able to corroborate this when the figure was stolen in 1990 and presumably has not been viewed since? How accurate is the replica if based on photographs / ‘other details’? Would nipples be visible from a photograph?] They state she was not in original situ, taking their evidence for this from O’Connor [“The stone was 32” long and approximately 20” wide ... It’s depth was precariously shallow, between 6-9 inches. Neither did the stone fit the normal alternating-size pattern of quoins. The likelihood is that it was not part of the original building” [O’Connor 1991: 6], who derived his information from O’Donovan [1840]. They correct themselves from the earlier [1995] entry by stating that the replica has not yet been erected on the church.</p>
	Other information / comments	Doing a jig? See also Freitag [1998/9: 66] who discusses the dance called a ‘Sheelin-a-gig’ or ‘Sheela na Gigg’.

26	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Leighmore (Liathmor) / Map 67 S 225576 Tipperary 19 July 2000 Church In N doorway, on left side on stone at bottom of voussoirs c.5' Primary Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	Very hard to see the sheela. Lightly incised. She's on a stone inserted horizontally, and she's lying horizontally in line with the stone. Head: Large, flat-topped. Arms: Both in front of her body, with both hands going into the vulva. Legs: Long, straight. Breasts: Evident, her right one bigger and more rounded than the left which is quite triangular. Feet: shaped as rounded ends of legs. Beneath feet there is a strange motif. Striation for possible ribs .	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Ball decoration at base of this stone; matching stone opposite in doorway, which has a possible sculpted figure: another flat-headed image which ends in 'feet' which are opposite sheela's head. Totally plain voussoirs. Romanesque window to E of this doorway, above which a stone has been inserted which has some very eroded sculpture on it – but could very tenuously be another sheela. Above it is another very eroded sculpture impossible to make out. To its left is a pair of human heads, badly eroded but distinguishable. S doorway is directly opposite N doorway, is Romanesque arch, with several figures above it: immediately above it is a pair of human figures, closely coupled and full length, frontal. Above this couple are 2 single heads either side, and 1 head higher up to the left. To far right above door is another paired couple, again full length. All these images look like additions.	
	Architectural history	C12th church with later tower addition. On earlier C7th monastic site.	
	Other features	E wall of church has double-light ogee-headed window, inserted into blocked up Romanesque arch doorway. Tower at E end of church with square structure adjacent to it at N which is	


		solid (i.e. not hollow inside), with a rectangular hole on N side like a chimney. S side clearly shows tower is later than W end of church, with 2 rectangular windows & 2 slit windows, upper one much smaller than lower. Also a rainwater spout to E end. Moving along to the W there is an arched Romanesque window. Single-light ogee-headed window in W wall.
	Topography	This is the larger of 2 churches set in fields, of C7th monastic site. SW of N8 Dublin-Cork road. Base of a round tower to the N of the larger church, smaller church to NE of this. Many lumps and bumps in area, evidence for walls etc.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Lynch, P.J.</u> 1914. 'Liathmore-Mochoemog', <i>JNMAS</i>, 3(2): 73-91. Suggests the original church was founded by Mochoemog about AD 580, with the smaller of the present two extant churches probably being built on that original site, and around the saint's grave. The smaller church "may have been the work of Cuangus, a famous Abbot of Liathmore whose death is recorded AD 746" [p.76]. Both Cuangus and Mochoemog appear to have influenced the fame of Liathmore, and "explains the two figures carved side by side on the same stones ... which are to be seen in the walls of the larger church and formed portions of the carved ornament of the early Romanesque church ... most probably dedicated to Mochoemog and Cuangus" [p.77]. The north door appears to be the original entrance, Lynch says. With the foundation of the Cistercian monastery of Holy Cross in 1182, Liathmore ceased to be an important ecclesiastical centre, "as the policy of the Cistercian order was to ignore all the Celtic foundations" [p.81]. The north doorway "resembles the doorway in Temple Connor, Clonmacnoise" [p.83] assigned a date of c. AD 1010. Lynch refers to the carving on the west impost, which is now barely discernible, but may have been less so in 1914 for he says "what may have been a head can be traced" [p.83], as well as the bead ornament. The eastern impost image is clearer and Lynch identifies it as a sheela. Lynch also observed a small 10" square stone with a simple diagonal interlace design on it, in the inner jamb of the small southern window of the nave [p.89].</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 119], Type 1c, "The figure lies horizontally on the sandstone impost of the north doorway of the larger of the two churches. It is a good deal stylised and suggests a decorative motif ... probably not later than the twelfth century". References: <i>JNMAS</i> 1914: 83-85, but with no content.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: In gazetteer [p.150]: "On this site of a monastery (7th cent.) ... within the simple, stacked Romanesque N door [of the larger church] is a sheela, carved as standing, with very straight legs, and with both hands joined around the pudenda. Large head of</p>

		<p>triangular shape, with big eyes. Tiny breasts. The naïve figure is carved in one piece with the chamfer, as she appears 'on her side' above a row of pellets."</p> <p>Photo [p.97], with caption that suggests the figure was deliberately inserted horizontally because of the downward-pointing pellet decoration, which also dates the piece to the last quarter of the C12th [p.98].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Listed in gazetteer [p.162], in List B (Ireland) [p.118], and on distribution map [p.126], classified as type 3a. No picture.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: 1995 guide [p.23]: incorrectly states that the sheela is on the C11th or C12th tower. He says "it is described as standing" (obviously taken from Andersen's description) and "with both hands joined around the genital organs" which, together with his incorrect location of the figure, suggests he has not been to see this site himself. No drawing.</p> <p>1997 map: has poor drawing.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 138-9]: "The figure ... is on her side but can be described as standing with straight legs, with hands joined around the genital organs and with a large triangular head and eyes. There is a decorative motif at her feet, a foliate design of six lobes, which Dr Guest suggests is a degenerate form of the palmette". This last comment is simply not true; they refer to Guest's 1936 article, which does not state this. It does not mention a palmette or the foliate design at all, in fact. Guest's reference to the 'decorative motif' is in relation to the sheela itself.</p>
	Other information / comments	

27	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Moate castle / Map 48 Westmeath 24 July 2000 Fortified house Exterior W wall, at rear of house c. 7'6" Secondary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	Surrounded by a concrete 'frame'. Legs: none. Head: Too large in relation to body, with furrowed brow (similar to that at Ballynahinch). Big, prominent cheeks; small, quite pointed chin. Mouth: open in grimace with possible 5 peg-like teeth in upper jaw. Bottom lip smooth, no teeth. Eyes: Almond-shaped, each with a line underneath. Breasts: Small & neat, close together, immediately under chin. To her left, coming down her left side, possible indication of her left leg which appears to go behind her left arm. It looks similar on her right side, but with no lower leg remaining at all. She could therefore be in a squatting type position. Belly: distended – possibly pregnant. A clear line immediately beneath breasts marks the top of the belly. There is also another line going from her left to right slightly at an angle down, and another clear line demarcating the bottom of the belly, which also goes up around her belly underneath to her right. Beneath this line the vulva is clearly shown, with both hands going into it at the sides, fingers clearly shown. She is c. 10" tall x 6" wide.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	In N wall, around corner to the left of where the sheela is, there is a single-light ogee-headed window, and a round window with a celtic / trefoil design. Both are older than the wall they're in.	
	Architectural history	Originally an Anglo-Norman castle dating from 1180s, with very little architectural evidence for this remaining. It is still a residence, which was extended during the C17th when the	


		Clibborn family lived here. The W wall (with the sheela) is c. 20' high & has crenellations at the top. It looks C17th, and definitely no earlier.
	Other features	<p>The sheela is above a small, plain Gothic-arch door, which has to its left a double carriage door into a working courtyard.</p> <p>100m to the W of the rear of the castle, is a Quaker cemetery, dating from 1694 (archway into cemetery has plaque saying 'Built by John Clibborn AD 1694. Rebuilt in 1768'. There's also a grave of a Cuthbert John Clibborn, 2nd son of C.J. Clibborn of the Castle Moate, born 10th Jan. 1846, died at Rosemount, 4th Jan. 1914. There are at least 4 other Clibborns in the cemetery. We can assume, therefore, that Clibborns were here at Castle Moate from C17th till at least 1846 continuously.</p>
	Topography	The castle is in the town, on the main road.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 120]: "Over the gate of a yard behind the Castle, in a wall rebuilt in 1649, is a character 11 inches high, in an oval sunk in a slab. It has unusual characters: the face is proportionately very large, with a markedly geometric treatment of the features; and an extruded tongue: a belt passes obliquely around the abdomen. The whole suggests a late grotesque treatment of the subject." Small photo [Fig.32]. As Guest does not refer to any previous reference for this sheela, it may be assumed that either she or Helen Roe 'discovered' it.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: In gazetteer [p.150], with photo. His description mostly restates what Guest said, except he does not mention the tongue protruding, but does include "wide mouth with thick lips and teeth showing. Small breasts indicated, hands joining in gesture around slit of pudenda, fingers shown holding on." He emphasises this sheela's "geometricized" appearance" [p.100], although this is not really an appropriate descriptive term.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Listed in gazetteer [p.162], on distribution map [p.126], classified as type 3a, and in List B (Ireland) [p.118]. No photo or drawing.</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 29] Booklet: "This little figure is over the gateway at the rear of Moate Castle which is dated to the 1600s." With appalling drawing. 1997 map: Just says the figure is over the gateway at the rear of Moate Castle. No drawing.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 141]: The "figure has a wide mouth with thick lips showing teeth and a protruding tongue, a striated hair style and a waist belt or band across the abdomen. Both hands, with fingers clearly indicated, are shown holding the vulva to leave</p>

		no doubt about her classification as a Sheela, although it is suggested that it is a later grotesque treatment of the subject.” They only refer to Andersen. The drawing is different but still dire. They say the figure is only 3.35cm high, which would be ridiculous, and the “striated hairstyle” is blatantly not evident to anyone who has looked closely at the image. I think it unlikely that they have actually visited this sheela.
	Other information / comments	This sheela is not in an immediately visible location, at the rear of the house, away from the main portion of the house and the main entrance, near the working courtyard.



28	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Rath Blathmac / Map 57. R 271856 Clare 29 December 2000 Church. C14th? Inserted upside-down, in S. wall, interior of church, on re-used window lintel c. 5' Secondary Sheela is limestone	
	Description of sheela	Very hard to make the sheela out. She's c. 8" tall x 5" wide. Head: not very clear (no features easily visible). Neck: none. Breasts: obvious, rounded and pendulous. Belly: distended, possibly pregnant. Arms: her left goes down to her vulva across inside of her left thigh; her right appears to go up into the air to the right of her head. Legs: her left leg is bent outwards at the knee, with inner foot facing outwards; her right is not visible and is damaged.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	To the right of the limestone lintel is a mitred bishop's head, in another type of stone, poorly sculpted. To the left of the lintel is a single slit window.	
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Westropp, T.J.</u> 1894. 'Churches with round towers in northern Clare', (Part 1): 25-34. Pages 30-34 contains information about Rath and the sheela. Beautiful line drawing of the lintel stone with the 'sheela' figure clearly shown, but not necessarily as a sheela, although Westropp describes the image as such, "struggling with two monsters, which bite her ears" [p.33]. He also identifies the interlace foliate designs, the serpents and the dragon-like image as Scandinavian in origin of design style. This is picked up on by Guest, below, and becomes re-iterated though the literature. Leask [1955: 162-3] refers to Rathblathmac in terms of the Scandinavian influence, citing other examples (of	

		<p>foliage/serpent-like beasts, not sheelas) at Killeslin, Clonmacnoise, Killaloe, & Kilmore.</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 112]: "The figure forms part of the decorated stone-work over a recess in the south wall of the nave of the ruined church. It is head downwards and flanked by two animals of Scandinavian affinities. Type Ia or II." Photo [Pl. XI, facing p.115]. She does not mention that the lintel has been inserted upside-down.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>: In gazetteer [p.151]: "On fragment of a lintel in remains of a nave-and chancel church of various dates named after St. Blathmac. The fragment ... shows animal ornament closely related to serpents on late Romanesque window at Annaghdown, Co. Galway, dated to c. 1180." Referring to the sheela, it is "standing, with knees widely splayed, between animals raised on their hind legs." Two photos and one line drawing, pp. 45-6.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: [1986: 34]: refer to it as a "supposed" sheela. Listed in gazetteer, p.163, but not on the distribution map (p.126) or in the List B (Ireland) of female exhibitionists (p.18). Their page 34 reference also has a photo which very clearly shows the image to be a sheela. Page 25 gives a schematic line drawing of the Rath sheela figure and they make comparisons with a slab figure from Gotland, Sweden, which shows an image they declare is female with "widely splayed legs" holding a pair of affronted snakes. It is therefore unclear as to what Weir & Jerman are really saying about the Rath sheela.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 27] Booklet: " ... the Sheela-na-Gig is found as part of the ornamented carvings of window lintel. The ornament is related to serpentine ornament found elsewhere." Very schematic drawing, which incorrectly emphasises a shape beneath the vulva as a crescent moon-like shape. 1997: map. No drawing. Gives brief location and says "the Sheela-na-Gig forms part of the ornamentation of a window lintel."</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u>: [2001: 144]: "the animal carvings on this stone have been related to a figure found on a window at Annaghdown, Co. Galway, c. 1180, and a Scandinavian origin has also been suggested". No references for these statements. They also highlight Murray's illustration [1934: plate X, stated, incorrectly by McMahon & Roberts as fig. 21; it is actually fig.24], reputedly from Carrowfield church, which they say is "identical" to the sheela from Rath. It is quite possible that the given location for this sheela in Murray's article is in error, and it is, in actual fact, the Rath figure, and not another 'identical' one. Drawing: more thickly embellished version of the booklet one. When compared with Weir &</p>
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		Jerman's (excellent) photo [1986: 34], it is obvious that McMahon & Roberts have either not visited the sheela or are 'biasing' the evidence. They omit to show the rotund belly with belly button; they enlarge the vulva; and they accentuate the shape beneath the vulva to look like a crescent moon. They also make the eyes 'panda-like', and don't show the 'beasts' at either side of the sheela, instead showing part of that imagery as weird shapes at either side of the sheela's 'neck' (which she does not have). Very misleading.
	Other information / comments	


29	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Redwood castle / Map 53. M 929098 Tipperary On hill 14 September 2001 Tower house On E wall above main doorway, just below a later gallery c. 50' Probably primary Sheela possibly limestone	
	Description of sheela	Due to great height of where image is placed it is extremely difficult to see some of the detail even with a zoom lens. She is also a small figure. Head: Very square. Odd angle of head, tilted backwards. Head disproportionately large to rest of body, being about a third of total length. Ears: very large right ear, 'Celtic' cup-handle style, at middle side of head; her left ear is the same style but a lot smaller and slightly higher up the side of the head. Mouth: wide, open, no expression. Arms: Thin, coming across body, perhaps even crossing each other above groin area. Hands may go to vulva , but there also appears to be an anus . Very round hole beneath vulva. Legs: Quite chunky compared to arms, slightly bent at knees, and feet facing outwards slightly. Possible ribs on sheela's left side of torso.	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Guest</u> : Not in b) <u>Andersen</u> : Not in c) <u>Weir</u> : [1980: 62; 63]. The first to identify this sheela in the literature. Describes the carving as "some ten metres up, and a little to the west of the doorway on the side of the castle (at present undergoing renovation), is a rather pathetic figure, very crudely carved.	

		<p>An enormous head and spindly body make it look like an ice-cream cone. The legs are very slightly splayed, and the arms hang asymmetrically across the body, the right hand apparently holding the left wrist. The left hand, unusually, pulls the large and pendant vulva from above. The breasts are tiny, round and asymmetrical; the eyes, nose and mouth are large. On the sides of the head and body are grooves" [p.63]. It may be that Weir was able to access this sheela at close quarters for such a description, perhaps via scaffolding during renovation. But no photo.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: In gazetteer [p.163]; on distribution map [p.126], classed as a figure with one hand either touching or indicating the pudenda; [p.119] additional list of figures not in Andersen, says of Redwood sheela "a crude figure with a large head pulls at a big pendent vulva with one hand". This is not actually discernible. She is certainly not 'crude', however, whichever way that may be interpreted, in execution of the carving or in content. No photo.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 24] Booklet: Listed, but clearly not visited – no description, or drawing.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 145]: The sheela is " ... sculptured in deep relief and has a large head, large eyes, nose and mouth, and a prominent 'C'-shaped right ear. The body is long and slender with tiny round breasts, and is grooved at the sides of the head and body. Her legs are only slightly splayed and she is touching or pulling the vulva from above". No mention is made of the anus; as the breasts are not clearly visible, McMahon & Roberts' reference to them may be conjectural.</p>
	Other information / comments	

30 & 31	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Scregg (A) and (B) / Map 40. M 931558 Roscommon Houseowner's private land 10 September 2001 Stone outbuilding 2 sheelas re-incorporated either side of main doorway Both c. 13' At least secondary Limestone	 Scregg (A)	 Scregg (B)
	Description of sheela	<p>(A) L.h. figure: Carved in deep relief on the top half only of a stone. Stone is c. 15" tall x 7.5" wide; the figure is 4.5" tall x 6" wide at widest point which is from foot to foot. Head: 2" long, nearly half the height of the figure; turned slightly to her left. Facial features are hard to make out. Eyes: slight indentation to indicate them. Nose: slight rise to indicate it. Mouth: open, large scooped out hole. No ears. No neck. Head is on top of torso. Breasts: none visible. Belly: rotund. Arms: go down sides of body; left arm goes over her left leg, right arm possibly goes behind right leg. Both hands clearly go into the vulva. Vulva: Clearly defined, upside-down 'V', quite deeply carved. Just above the hands and below the rotund part of the belly there is an incised horizontal line [similar to Moate?]. Legs: wide apart. Left leg slightly bent at knee; right leg badly damaged. Feet: facing outwards, no detail.</p> <p>(B) R.h. figure: On a voussoir-shaped piece of stone. Stone is 12" tall x 9.5" wide; the figure is 11" tall x 6" wide at widest point. Head: length 3.5", resting in dip between shoulders. Eyes: almond-shaped. Ears: also almond-shaped and in line with eyes. Mouth: very well defined upper lip. Tongue: protruding. No neck. Breasts: small, round. Torso: 'V' shaped. Arms: bent outwards at elbows, coming in across and down body. Hands: go across top of groin, with at least index fingers going into vulva. Possible anus shown. Ribcage: can be felt – not ribs, but lower part of cage. Fingers: on her right hand more clearly visible; left hand</p>		

		fingers not really discernible apart from index finger. Legs: in proportion to the rest of the body; apart, bent slightly at knees, feet facing outwards. No toes visible.
	Other sculpture/decoration	
	Architectural history	The sheelas are reputed to have come from the castle, of which scant remains are on the adjacent hill. The stone outbuilding is also reputed to have been made from the stones of the castle. This information was provided by the current owner of the land.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: Not in</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Not in</p> <p>d) <u>Siggins, A.</u> [1990]. The first to record these sheelas in the literature. Scregg House was built around 1760 and was “lived in until recently when the owner Mr. Peter Kelly moved to a new residence nearby ... Notice of the ‘Sheela-na-gigs’ first came with the interest of the Lally family of Scregg Mill who brought them to the attention of the National Museum in 1983. The two stones on which the ‘Sheelas’ are carved are positioned on the gable wall over the entrance of a carriage building that appears contemporary with the house [1760]” [p.45]. Siggins refers to the old castle (now completely ruined) at the back of the Georgian house which “appears to have been used as a quarry to build the carriage house, various walls and probably the house itself due to the quantity of chisel-punch dressed stones that can be seen in these structures” [p.45]. The castle was a tower house, and Siggins says it is “reasonably certain that it was from the dismantling of this tower house that the two carved figures were saved and re-erected in their present position” [pp.44-5]. Provides a limited description of the left hand figure, saying “it may rank as the smallest exhibitionist figure in Ireland” [p.46], and a more detailed and accurate description for the right hand figure.</p> <p>e) <u>Cherry, S.</u> [1992]. Has Scregg listed for sheelas still in situ, but no other information.</p> <p>f) <u>Roberts</u>: Not in his [1995] booklet.</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 147-8]: Comment that the r.h. figure is depicted in a similar posture to that of the Ballinderry sheela but has ears that are “strikingly similar to the cow ears of the figure at Kilsarkan”, Co. Kerry. It is suggested that there is a connection</p>


		<p>between the sheelas of Scregg and Rahara church, there being less than 4km distance. This would make their previous comment regarding the cow ears a bit redundant, if proximity is the criterion. Interestingly, McMahon & Roberts' drawings of the figures are very similar to those in Siggins' article shown the wrong way round with the left hand figure (Scregg A) being shown to the right of the right hand figure, as Siggins has them, although they actually are placed as I have shown them.</p>
	Other information / comments	

32	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Taghmon / Map 41. N 515600 Westmeath 27 July 2000 Church Exterior, on N. wall immediately above a single ogee-headed window c. 8' Secondary – she's on a piece of stone (which is a different type of stone) set into the main stones of the church wall Sheela is sandstone	
	Description of sheela	<p>c. 14" high x 14" wide at shoulders. Her very lower legs and feet are missing. She's in heavy bas-relief from the stone block behind her. There is a concave depression of c. ¼" on top of the head. Head: very large, resting forward on her chest. Neck: none. Eyes: Two sets, apparently. Top set of eyes: her left is deeper set. Lower set: similar. Nose: off-set with broad nostrils which are oval-shaped with distinct lobes. Mouth: large, rectangular with 2 deeply drilled holes on each side within the lips' edge. Teeth: incised horizontal line to indicate teeth. Chin: is odd – it hangs down almost like jowls. Beneath chin is a 'lump' c. 1" long x ½" wide. Hands: R.h. has 4 fingers + thumb; L.h. has 3 fingers + thumb, or 4th finger. Hands clasped around knees, legs up towards chest. Ribs: indicated on r. side (5), ridges in a rib-like fashion. On L. side - no indication of ribs, just irregular stone with no pattern.</p> <p>Shoulders: hunched, very rounded. There is a deep hole which is probably an anus. Vulva: not clearly shown but may be indicated by an elongated shallow ovate-type groove to her left above the anus.</p> <p>Her R. hand has very natural representation & is very well preserved; her L. hand is much smaller due to weathering or damage. Unusual features: On her left side of nose, midway down, is a deeply drilled hole; there are 2 more of these of similar size on each side of the nostrils, just below them and slightly to the sides. These holes look like part of the sculpting to highlight the protruding mouth. The whole mouth area indicates she is almost blowing,</p>	

		with teeth clenched and in pain [Childbirth]. The 'jowls' could be the sinews visible on the neck when straining to push a baby out, with teeth clenched.
	Other sculpture/decoration	The ogee windows are sandstone but different from the stone of the main body of the church [which is limestone: cf. Leask 1928: 108]. To the W. end of 2 nd ogee window (the one with the sheela) is the main entrance to the church which has a carved head in sandstone above it. Weathered: either a mitred bishop or a king with crown. On W. wall, N. corner, is another carved head in sandstone – secondary insertion into wall; set at an angle to the wall with its left side of head angled downwards. Quite badly weathered but clearly shows its right eye deliberately missing, with the left eye depicted. Reminiscent of a leper's head. Does not look like a healthy person. Mouth indicated + hint of a nose, thin neck going into wall, its right ear clearly visible but not its left. Left eye looks closed. S. wall: has blocked-up, very small (c. 4' high) round-arched doorway, and 2 ogee windows: W. one has some decoration on side-hood panel/mullion. E. window much later.
	Architectural history	Church was in ruins in 1622 (described in Bishop Ussher's Visitation of Meath Diocese, referred to by Leask 1928: 103). Full preservation in 1926 by the Commission of Public Works, which allowed Leask to make careful examination and surveys. Leask thinks that the windows and inserted carvings indicate a "re-building using such existing features as remained from an older edifice" [1928: 109], which suggests he thinks there was an earlier church in existence prior to this one.
	Other features	Graveyard: to S. of church, immediately behind it contains some very old graves. Full of 'bumps'. Perimeter bank of graveyard has oval or circular shape. Earthworks: to SE. 400-500 m. away. The nearer one could be a boundary; the farther one could be modern. Old wall: to NW, 100 m. or less away, with block-up pointed arched doorway – large blocks of stone making up voussoirs. ?Date. Looks old! This wall is part of a square enclosure / walled garden, with a second blocked-up pointed arched doorway in N. wall (exactly the same style as in the S. wall), & another in the E. wall. There does not appear to be anything archaeological within this enclosed area though. To NE, c.100 m. or so away, is another small hillock with lumps & bumps. Aerial photo of this area would be useful.

	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Leask, H.G.</u> 1928. <i>JRSAI</i>, 58: 102-110. Thorough article covering the history, description, and detailed plans of the church, with two photos. The only reference he makes to the sheela is: "There are also fragments of carving placed rather erratically here and there, one over a north window being of a grotesque seated figure" [p. 108].</p> <p>b) <u>Guest</u>: [1936: 120]. This figure is not in the <i>FRSAI</i> 1894 list. "Over a trefoil window in the north wall is a grotesque figure which from the attitude, clasping the flexed legs, may be a sheela-na-gig. The lower part of the stone is broken away, so that the character is doubtful." Type III. Pl. XIII, Fig 30, facing p.119. References: <i>JRSAI</i>, 1928, 58: 102.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u>:</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>:</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u>:</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>Dúchas info. board: "A monastery was founded here in C6th [AD] by St. Fintan (Munna) but the present church was built as a parish church in C15th. It is a long, undivided structure with a barrel-vault (stone arched roof). 4 original windows survive (2 in N. and 2 in S. walls), but the E. window is recent. The piscina is very finely carved. Massive [large] tower at W. end of church was intended to provide vital security for the priest living in the church; such security measures were introduced to many churches during a very turbulent period. The tower is 4 storeys high, with vaulted ceilings over the 1st and 3rd storeys. The 2nd floor was the main living space; it has a fireplace, 2 windows with seats and a slop-stone (drain). Above was the bedroom to which is connected a small garderobe."</p> <p><u>Earlier possible provenance</u></p> <p>There appears to have been a C13th castle (ruinous in 1928, as referred to by Leask, p.102) which was near the present church, and I suggest that this is where the sheela may have originally come from. The castle may have been burnt in 1452, and the church dates to the C15th, so this is quite plausible. The suggestion is very interesting because it means that a sheela has been on an earlier non-secular building and re-used in a church building.</p>

33	Site / OS ref (1:50 000)	Toomregan church / Map 27A
	Townland/County	Ballyconnell / Cavan
	General location	
	Date visited	13 September 2001
	Building type	
	Location within building	
	Ht. above ground	
	Primary/ secondary insertion	
	Geology	
	Description of sheela	
	Other sculpture/decoration	
	Architectural history	
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	
	Other information / comments	Could not find this image because Roberts' [McMahon & Roberts 2000: 152-3] directions / locational description is inaccurate. Locals said 'Toomregan' as a place does not exist, and there is certainly no church called that. The parish is that of Kil and Tomregan. The image may be in the Church of Ireland church just outside the town. Subsequently this was verified by my discovery of Hickey's book 'Images of stone' [1976] which states the figure is at the Church of Ireland church in Ballyconnell. Hickey refers to the image as a male exhibitionist, however, so it is very dubious that it should be included in Roberts' corpus of sheelas in any case.

34	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Tullavin Castle / Map 65. R 536388 Limerick Rural, but in grounds of later house (still occupied) 8 September 2001 Tower house Sheela is on quoin stone (c. 2'2" x 18") on S facing wall 35' – 40' Primary Limestone	
	Description of sheela	Inserted horizontally. Head: too small in relation to body. Mouth: eroded completely. Face area is quite badly weathered or possibly mutilated (although it is probably too high up for this). Quite a long face with a fairly pointed chin. Tiny round ear at left of her face. She may have hair – hard to tell. Nostrils: both clearly visible. Arms: right arm bends out at elbow; not clear where her right hand goes, perhaps onto her right hip. Left arm bent at elbow with upper arm going up towards her left side of head. Shoulders: quite large. Breasts: visible, quite long and rounded. Waist: tiny. Most unusual torso shape, coming in to a 'V' at waist from these big shoulders. Thighs: also very large. Legs: wide apart, squatting position, feet facing outwards, toes well-defined on both feet, but particularly her left foot. There is a line across her right thigh which may possibly be part of her right hand. Vulva: indicated clearly and very naturalistically, with outer labia clearly shown, but not right into the vulva as many sheelas depict.	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history		
	Other features	Four surviving walls of tower house. S wall: has 2 surviving thin single-light ogee-headed windows, 2 round-arched slim ones, and 1 narrow small rectangular window at ground floor, c. 5'-6' from ground at W end of this wall. About 6'6" from ground to E side of S wall is a small angled round squint hole, angled towards the E. Main doorway is in E wall so squint	

		would enable view of people coming to main door. SE corner of S wall: lower buttressed part of wall has been carved with a simple ogee-shaped design. E wall: has 5 surviving windows. 3 single-light thin ogee-headed, 1 plain thin slit one; main window is to N of centre of E wall is large single-light ogee-headed with hood moulding. Doorway in E wall: plain with slightly pointed arch, simple Gothic style. N wall: has 3 surviving windows, plus another blocked-up one at highest floor; all are one above another in centre of wall. First floor window: largest, being single-light ogee-headed. Window above this is the same style but also has some carving either side of the ogee top. W wall: has been attached to an extension of the tower house, although this is now not extant. At top floor level there is another Gothic style doorway. NE corner: lower buttressed part of wall also has carving with simple ogee shape design as at SE corner.
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Guest</u>: No. 19. No description but classed as a Type II [One arm and hand raised to the head, legs with thighs splayed] which is correct.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u>: No. 116 in corpus. Andersen thinks the same sculptor carved the sheela, the windows and the staircase, which he says has “handsome detail” [p.153], which he does not detail, and I was not able to view / verify.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u>: Listed in gazetteer [p.164]; in distribution map, with sheela incorrectly categorised as a “figure with only one hand passed behind” [p.126]; in List B Ireland [p. 118]; drawing [p.12].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u>: [1995: 26] Booklet: States sheela is placed high up on south face of the ‘peel’ tower, placed on its side as a quoin. [McMahon & Roberts 2000: 153-4]: State the tower is late C15th Peel tower; “well preserved figure, carved in relief, depicted in a reclining position on a quoin stone. Her left hand points to her head upon which is a very unusual head-dress and her right hand reaches down below the thigh to touch the rim of her pudenda”. Neither of these last two statements is evidenced from my observations of the figure.</p>
	Other information / comments	

PART B: BRITAIN

Earlier fieldwork sources cited chronologically (other references can be found in the sheela-specific or main bibliography):

Murray, M.A., and Passmore, A.D. 1923. 'The sheela-na-gig at Oaksey', *Man*, 23: 140-141.

Piggott, S. 1930. 'A primitive carving from Anglesey', *Man*, 30: 122-3.

Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and Monmouthshire. 1937. *An inventory of the ancient monuments in Anglesey*.

Hemp, W.J. 1938. In Miscellanea: 'Some unrecorded "Sheela-na-Gigs" in Wales and the Border', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 93(1): 136-139. [Only refers to the following sheelas: Austerfield, Church Stretton, Holdgate, Kilpeck, Llandrindod Wells, Oxford, Penmon, and South Tawton.]

Hutchinson, G.E., and Hutchinson, A.L. 1969. 'The "idol" or sheela-na-gig at Binstead: with remarks on the distribution of such figures', *Proc. of IOW Nat. Hist. & Arch. Soc.*, 6(4): 237-251.

Andersen, Jørgen 1977. *The witch on the wall: medieval erotic sculpture in the British Isles*. London : George Allen & Unwin.

Weir, A., and Jerman, J. 1986. *Images of lust: sexual carvings on medieval churches*. London: Batsford.

Roberts, Jack. [1995?] *The sheela-na-gigs of Britain and Ireland: an illustrated guide*. Skibbereen: Key Books.

McMahon, J., and Roberts, J. 2001. *The sheela-na-gigs of Ireland and Britain: the divine hag of the Christian Celts – an illustrated guide*. Cork: Mercier.

Hutchinson & Hutchinson use **Guest's typology** for sheelas:

Type I: Arms flexed and both hands directed to the lower abdomen, with

- a) Thighs splayed
- b) Thighs absent or slightly indicated
- c) Legs straight down

II: One arm as above, the other raised to the head, legs as in Ia

III: Thighs and knees tightly flexed to abdomen

[Hutchinson & Hutchinson 1969: 239]

Weir & Jerman's classification [1986: 126]:


- 1** Sheela-na-gigs with both hands passed below the thighs from behind, fingers inserted in the vulva
- 2** Figures with only one hand passed behind
- 3a** Figures with both hands passed in front to touch the pudenda
- 3b** Figures with both hands only indicating the pudenda
- 4** Figures with one hand either touching or indicating the pudenda
- 5** Anomalous figures, with sheela-like characteristics but too eroded or damaged to be accurately ascribed a class

Websites related to sheela-na-gigs

There are a number of these of varying quality of information. John Harding’s [www.sheelanagig.org] is one of the better ones which lists sheelas, albeit with a British emphasis because it is British-based. However, whilst it is a more accurate resource than any of Roberts’ publications, it allows identification of sheelas by members of the public resulting in images being wrongly identified as sheelas, and this can be misleading. An example of this is the figure [see Appendix One, part C, **Figures that are not sheelas**] at the church of SS Peter and Paul, Rock, Worcestershire, where the figure at first glance gives the appearance of a sheela, but has no vulva displayed, and in actual fact does not share any of the main sheela characteristics which I have discerned within my study. It is more likely to be a siren-like image derived from a European context and, ultimately, a Near Eastern origin.


QUICK REFERENCE FOR SITES VISITED

1. Ampney St Peter	12.Croft-on-Tees	23.South Tawton
2. Austerfield	13. Fiddington	24.Stanton St Quintin
3. Bilton-in-Ainstey (A)	14.Haddon Hall	25. Stoke-sub-Hamdon (A)
4. Bilton-in-Ainstey (B)	15.Holdgate	26. Stoke-sub-Hamdon (B)
5. Binstead	16.Kilpeck	27.Studland
6. Bridlington Priory (A)	17.Llandrindod Wells	28.Tugford (A)
7. Bridlington Priory (B)	18.Oaksey	29.Tugford (B)
8. Buckland	19.Oxford	30.Whittlesford
9. Buncton	20.Penmon (A)	31.Worth Matravers
10.Church Stretton	21.Penmon (B)	
11.Copgrove	22.Romsey Abbey	

1	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Ampney St Peter Gloucestershire Small, rural village 21 July 2001 Church: nave, chancel, one aisle (to N). Interior, N. wall separating nave from aisle at W. end of church, close to font 6'6" – 7' Secondary Sheela is same stone as other carved features of church (Cotswold stone?)	
	Description of sheela	Carved in bas-relief on a block c. 12" high x 8" wide. Head: is proud of the block by up to 2", twice that of the rest of body, giving greater emphasis to the head. Head is also disproportionately large to rest of body. Quite a long-shaped face with rounded top and squared-off chin. Hair: clearly shown as a band over top of head, and possibly braided. Eyebrows: shown. Eyes: oval and may be shut. Nose: badly damaged but looks as though it was very broad, coming down from end of inner eyebrow and splaying outwards. Nostrils: one small hole visible on her left side of nose. Mouth: deeply incised with a definite smile. Large lower lip. No teeth shown. Neck: shown, straight-sided. Shoulders: visible. Arms: thin, spindly. Her left arm clearly goes out at the elbow and bends in again for her left hand to lie across her left thigh. Her right arm is much less well defined with regard to being bent at the elbow, but her right wrist looks bent inwards with flat-shape of upper part of hand resting on her right hip and slightly across her belly. Legs: Wide apart. Her right leg is very badly damaged, but looks like it may have been just straight. Her left knee is bent outwards with rest of lower leg bent inwards again, but missing from the shin down. Breasts: small and very round. Quite widely spaced (not naturalistic). Her left breast is virtually under her left armpit, her right breasts is slightly more in towards the rest of the body. Her right breast also has 3 striation marks to its right from the side of body. These marks are definitely associated with the breast: there are no more lower down, thus they are not ribs. Possible striation marks	

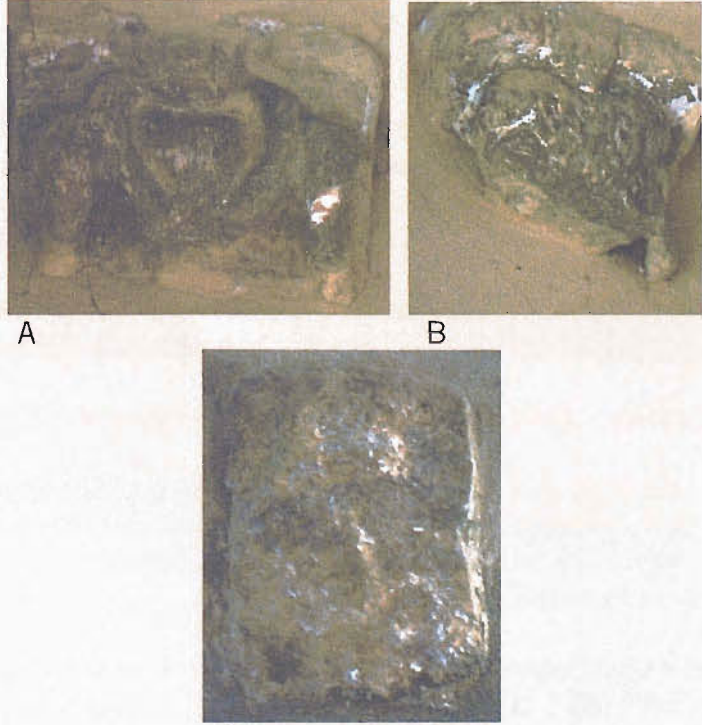
		associated with her left breast but damaged. There is an upside-down 'V' shape chiselled between the breasts. Stomach: below the inverted 'V' and breasts the whole stomach area is noticeably swollen.
	Other sculpture/decoration	Rest of the church: Interior: Gothic, with older tower. Foliage carved on truncated pillar stops of 2 arches of nave / aisle division. Blocked-up tiny spiral staircase to left of where rood screen may have been. Chancel arch may be transitional Romanesque-Gothic: it has 3 orders, outer order has simple design of triangles (not chevrons) in bas relief. Pillars are square though. Exterior: On S side, one carving of a head, for water drainage from gutter (but not a gargoyle). Secondary doorway into church from porch at facing S at W end is much older than the main doorway: more Romanesque-looking with round arch but squared-off label stops, and lower jambs quite squared-off. The sheela is just inside this doorway to the left. Main doorway at W end is definitely Gothic (C14th/C15th).
	Architectural history	Church restored and enlarged c. 1878 or soon after. The church has a late Saxon nave with round-headed tower arch, and transitional Norman chancel arch [Pevsner 1979: 89]. Church at Ampney St Mary has an early C12th nave and a possible pre-Conquest SW window in the nave [Pevsner 1979: 87-8].
	Other features	
	Topography	Small, village setting. Ranbury ring (a univallate Iron Age hill fort) is half a mile to the SE.
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 245]: Noted as being in Wiltshire. "Inside the church on the south wall of the nave looking into the south aisle, about seven feet from the ground. The sheela is described by Dobson [1931, fig. 2] as 15 inches high, with well-marked high rounded breasts, indication of ribs and clearly marked genitalia. The legs are small and broken, so that its place in type I is not clear [i.e. they cannot determine the position of the thighs or whether legs go straight down]. The church dates from Saxon times but the position of the figure indicated that it may be much less old." b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 140]: In his gazetteer (as being in Gloucestershire). Quotes comment by Hutchinson ('seven feet from ground'), and Dobson (re: height, breasts, ribs, genitalia). Adds "the lower half is defaced, but there is an outline of pudenda still showing. Small, spindly arms, and breasts set high, near the arm-pits. Large round face on a broad neck. Close-fitting hair."

		<p>References Dobson [1931]; Hutchinson [1969]; Keyser, C.E. 1914. 'Notes on the churches of ... Ampney St Peter's', JBAA, 2nd ser., v. 20; Taylor, H.M., & Taylor, J., 1965. Anglo-Saxon architecture, v. 1: 27.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: In gazetteer list [p.160]; on distribution map [p.128], described as a figure "with both hands only indicating the pudenda"; and in list A, England and Wales [p.116].</p> <p>d) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 154-5]: Say the figure has been moved inside the church (they don't say from where), that the image is sandstone, that the lower half is damaged but "her other features are well preserved", stating these as "well marked breasts set high near the armpits, indication of ribs and an outline of the vulva". They also say that Andersen saw the genitalia as well-defined, and that the image is 40cm (i.e. 15 inches) high.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>Emphasis to head. Possible pregnant / childbirth image.</p> <p>Half a mile up the road towards Cirencester is the Church of Ampney St Mary. This is where I am fairly sure the sheela at Ampney St Peter came from. It is a much older church, c. early C12th, with several bits of Romanesque sculpture. Restored in 1913.</p> <p>Early Norman tympanum above N doorway (external), now blocked up. The Church history information leaflet stated this image is of a lion (emblem of Good) trampling down upon the two-headed serpent of Evil. "There is no similar example in England."</p> <p>Early Norman font, Norman window to W of doorway (S porch is the present door). Masonry of walls is mainly Norman.</p> <p>Chancel arch is mid-C14th which has a rare low, stone screen which retains the carved arm-rest of a returned stall. E window and most of Chancel is C13th.</p> <p>Walls are covered in medieval wall paintings (C12th –C15th according to Pevsner 1979: 88). Wagon roof.</p> <p>Original village of Ampney St Mary clustered around the church, rather than where it is now more than a mile from the church. The Ampney brook runs close to the church [possible connection of sheelas with water?]. The brook circuits the church, curving round part of it to the S.</p> <p>Information about research work on Ampney St Mary church (by Mike Champion) available from Lucy Champion: 01285-850785. Reference copies also at: the Corinium Museum, Park St., Cirencester, and The Bingham Library, The Waterloo, Cirencester.</p>

2	<p>Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Church of St Helena, Austerfield S. Yorkshire Set well back from the road (A614) at c. 150 yards. 26 July 2001 Church comprising nave, chancel, N aisle. On the corner of the capital of arch nearest the alter, N aisle, facing towards the nave. 5'4" Primary. The capitals on this side look post-Norman, however, whereas capitals for chancel arch are Romanesque.</p>	
	<p>Description of sheela</p>	<p>The figure measures 11.5" from the top of the head to the bottom of the vulva, and is 15" wide from toe to toe. She is in proportion apart from having disproportionately chunky thighs. A 'pear-shaped' figure. Head: badly damage, particularly her left side of her face. The facial features do not appear to have been deeply incised or sculpted in the first place. Head is quite round. Hair: shown as a zig-zag to her right side of the head. Chin: small, with mouth low down near chin. Nose cannot be discerned. Her right eye is a small oval with a double triangle lightly incised around it. Neck: none. Head sits on torso. Shoulders: quite chunky and upper arms, too, and a chunky torso. Arms: her right lower arm is thin and is not in proportion to her right upper arm. Her right arm goes in front across the top of the right thigh; her left arm goes behind the left thigh and under it to reach towards the vulva. Cannot tell if it goes into the vulva, but it certainly goes to its edge. Hands: her right hand goes down towards the vulva but, again, cannot tell if it goes into or holds it as hand is damaged. Vulva: a clearly incised slit just over 1" long. The area around her vulva, particularly below it, gives the impression the whole genital area is well below where it would be naturally. Breasts: not very apparent, although there is a <u>very</u> slightly raised piece of stone where her right breast would be, but is by no means a definite breast. Legs: her right leg is very well preserved, bent at the knee outwards – not a naturalistic</p>	

		<p>posture. Her left leg is badly damaged although it is possible to see where it goes to. Feet: her right foot is beautifully preserved, each toe clearly visible. Veil: there is a type of long veil or head-dress represented, which comes down from around her head and across her left side of the torso.</p> <p>Belly: does not look distended. Foliate leaves either side of her head.</p>
	Other sculpture/decoration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Human head carved at each side of the chancel arch on capitals at top of first order of arch. Otherwise very plain arch. 2) S doorway has carved tympanum, with dragon or serpent-like beast, with small pointy ears and a ball nose. 3) S doorway, first order of arch has 17 beak-heads, quite badly weathered. Outer arch has triple chevron pattern. There's been a third (original outer) order but this has been removed or completely damaged. 4) 5 round Norman capitals in aisle, the last at W end is later though, being octagonal.
	Architectural history	
	Other features	
	Topography	Old farm buildings either side of the church, the one to its N is called Church farm.
	Referred to by other authors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) <u>Murray</u> [1934: 98, & fig. 23 Pl. 10]: Mentions the Austerfield sheela as being "less energetic in action and may therefore be later in date", although she does not state what date she is referring to. b) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 138]: "prominently placed at one corner of a capital in the C12th north arcade of the nave ... replacing ... the normal foliage on the other corners." Hemp thinks this sheela is contemporary with C12th. c) <u>Pevsner</u> [1959: 87]: "At the corner of one capital a sheila-na-gig, in an exceptionally patent position." d) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 243]: Refer to both Hemp and Murray, and think the figure is later than C12th. They even go so far as to say that "the supposed sheela as illustrated [in Murray] might actually be a mutilated Gothic foliar ornament; possibly the wrong object was photographed." They could not have visited the site, therefore, as they would then have been able to confirm the location. e) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 140]: "The posture is seated and the figure is nude, except for a large headdress (veil?) reaching to the naked thigh. The r. hand across the lap reaches towards the genitalia, lightly indicated. The l. arm, joined to the thigh, suggests an intended gesture of


		<p>the hand beneath the thigh. Tool marks on the face.” H. 28 cm, w. 32 cm, depth c. 12cm, height of face 16cm, depth of headdress 8.5 cm. Andersen dates it to c. 1180 AD. References: Murray [p.93], Pevsner [Yorkshire, the West Riding, 1959: 87], Hutchinson, who Andersen says “misinterpreted” the figure.</p> <p>f) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.160], on distribution map [p.128] as type 4 in List A England and Wales [p.116]. Also photo [p.82, taken by Martin Pover], where they classify it as a type 2 sheela “on a late twelfth century capital. The face has been obliterated or perhaps was never intended to be delineated.”</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 155]: with drawing. Repeat what Andersen says apart from saying the “head-dress reaches to the stiff leaf of the foliage decoration”.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>This sheela is similar to the figure (also classed as a sheela in the literature) at Kildare cathedral. The Austerfield figure can perhaps be called a sheela as it is clearly gesticulating towards the vulva, but is not easy to group with other sheelas because of its otherwise non-sheela-like characteristics.</p> <p>Associated with foliage.</p>

3 & 4	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Helen's church, Bilton-in-Ainsty North Yorkshire Just off B1224 Wetherby to York road, isolated from village. 25 July 2001 Church, of possible original Saxon date Interior (although originally exterior) corbels on N side of chancel in the sacristy. c. 12' Primary ?	 <p>A B</p> <p>C</p>
	Description of sheela	Two sheelas, corbels; possible third sheela (sheela C) to the W of the S door inside on the wall. The two sheelas are at the E end of the (interior) corbel series, with the better preserved one (sheela A) to the left of the larger and less well-preserved one (sheela B). Sheela A: a large corbel. Head: very round. Slightly hunched posture. Eyes, nose, mouth, all clearly visible. Neck: none. Shoulders: come out from ear level. Arms: both come down in front of the body but very much to the sides, encompassing a large protruding abdomen. Pregnant / childbirth? Both hands go into the vulva holding it open. Legs: are preposterously wide apart, in a squatting position. A parturition posture. Breasts: none	


		<p>evident.</p> <p>Sheela B: Hard to make out, but overall shape is definitely sheela-like (much more so than, for eg., the Diddlebury examples). Much smaller figure than the other sheela. Head: small, egg-shaped, sitting on the torso. Can just make out mouth and eyes. Neck: none. Shoulders: large, rounded, possibly raised up in a hunch. Arms: look like they went behind legs. Legs: wide apart. Breasts: possibly. Vulva: none indicated as damaged lower section of body – her right leg is also missing.</p> <p>'Sheela' C: very weathered on a corbel-sized stone, but there is clearly something carved on it. It is possible there is a human head, thin torso, and legs splayed represented. If so, this is probably in secondary situ, having been removed from an exterior position, not even necessarily from this church, although perhaps from the earlier Saxon church and reinserted during C12th.</p>
	Other sculpture/decoration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) 3 Celtic / Saxon stone cross bases found around the church: 2 embedded in the walls by those doing C19th renovation, and 1 foundation section of a large cross found buried in the churchyard. 2) S porch, exterior, had a Norman flat arch with water-leaf decoration on columns – dates it to late C12th. 3) Windows: SW corner has a reconstructed Saxon slit window. From exterior, it is possible to see original rounded top stone for this window, and another at the same height in NW corner. In S wall to W and E of the doorway, 2 early C17th square windows. N wall: late C15th or early C16th window. W wall: small, rounded window high up, late Saxon or very early Norman. 4) Part of a Saxon cross (ex-situ) under the W window, c. 800 AD, which has a rood figure on each of the arms. It's a wheel cross of Maltese type [See: VCH Yorkshire, v.2: 128; Proc. of Soc. Antiquaries of Scotland, v.9: 127; Cambridge Antiquarian Soc., v.5]. 5) 8 original Norman pillars in nave. Plain with no carving on capitals at N side, and simple carving (either balls, or simple scroll or wheat-sheaf-type decoration) on S side. 6) Norman chancel arch: simple chevron pattern. 7) C12th corbel table, now mostly inside the church, apart from 6 that are still external on N wall at E end. 7 corbels in Lady chapel: 2 human heads (a bearded and moustached man, the other a male head with hand to mouth), 2 heads together of a bull and another (? animal); a lion; a mermaid holding two plaits of hair; and a strange animal head with

		tongue slightly protruding between lips, and wings for ears. 10 corbels on N side (from W to E): 2 human heads together (side by side), of bearded, moustached men; a beak-head; a mythical creature's head; human Celtic-style head; head with cattle-like horns and rectangular mouth, open, with teeth; bearded, moustached man; a mouth-puller (both sides of mouth); 3 inverted 'V's, inside each other; the less well-preserved sheela; the bigger sheela. Exterior corbels: a man's head; a queen's head; double human heads; 2 figures that cannot easily be made out, but may be one person standing behind another with a long object going from the one behind to the rear of the one in front (so, probably a sexual image); the last corbel is completely damaged.
	Architectural history	Originally a Saxon church. No evidence for Christianity in the area until AD 654; there are ruins of a monastery begun by Cedd. It is now part (the crypt) of the parish church of Lastingham. Sir Gilbert Scott did the reconstruction in 1868-9.
	Other features	Original blocked-up doorway on N wall near the W end.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Pevsner</u> [1959: 101-2]: Does not mention the sheela.</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969]: Not in</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 140.] 1) Larger figure, with photo : " a seated nude with exceptionally broad, swelling haunches, and arms joined in a simple gesture in front, around the abdomen." Height 20cm, width 25cm (of the corbel). Date c. 1160. 2) Less well-preserved figure: "A mutilated figure showing many signs of hacking. One thigh has been knocked off. The remaining small leg on the right, as well as the arm and hand held beneath it, suggest a posture of very patent display, which may have appeared offensive and caused the mutilation. Characteristic broad shoulders and a grim mouth." Measurements same as other figure, same date. Both figures reported to Andersen by Miss Katherine Galbraith. Andersen says [p.28] that the second figure shows signs of hacking to her face as well. He suggests that this figure was too offensive for someone, although this does not seem plausible when the first sheela with visible vulva is right next to her, and is unhacked. Andersen also mentions [pp.65-66] that the same sculptor will have produced all the carvings at this church, and he draws a similarity between the sheelas and the mermaid as motifs understood by this particular carver. Andersen does not substantiate this comment, however.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer, [p.160], on distribution map [p.128] as type</p>

		<p>3b and 5, List A England and Wales [p.116]. Type 3b is acceptable, but type 5 is too extreme in its assertion that the figure is too eroded to be described as a sheela.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 155]: With very inaccurate drawing. I doubt that they have visited this site, due to the extremely inaccurate drawing, and their statement that the sheelas are “at the east end of a series of carvings that include mermaids, bearded masks and animal heads”. They also say that the sheelas were originally on outside corbels “but after renovations were relocated inside the church”. This is not accurate, as the corbels were not relocated but built over by the new aisle extensions and thus protected from the elements.</p>
	Other information / comments	


5	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	<p>The Church of the Holy Cross, Binstead Isle of Wight / Hampshire</p> <p>14 May 2000 Church SW of the church, above a gate which is part of the graveyard wall. c. 9'</p> <p>Secondary; originally may have been over the north doorway of the church. Limestone</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>The figure is quite hard to clearly discern. The facial characteristics are very weathered. The general pose is sheela-like. Head: disproportionately large for the body; bald, with very large ears at the middles of the sides. Can clearly discern arms, hands and vulva. Legs: are hard to make out as the figure is 'sitting' on another image, which looks either ram- or horse-like. The 'horns' of the 'ram' could be the sheela's legs. The 'ram' does have a sheep-like mouth, but it also has ?hands/arms/bridle-wear on each side of the muzzle. These 'hands' almost look like a support to attach it to a wall. There is also a band-like rope across the nose between these bridle pieces. If you mentally remove these 'horns' (which do look more like the legs of the sheela anyway), and these side bridle pieces, the 'ram' looks more like a serpent's head. The sheela looks as though it is from a different piece of stone than the 'ram'.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>Some foliate sculpture in the church porch at the doorway. The W gable end has a male sculptural figure: a face, and hands with foliage. His arms come straight out from his head (no neck) but he appears to have shoulders. The foliage is sprouting out from under his chin, where his neck would be. Beneath this male image are two horse-like images, the right-hand one with its tail in its mouth, the left-hand one with wings. Both images are vertical rather than horizontal. The left-hand one has a beak/bird's head, and definitely has wings; it also has claws and striated ribs.</p>	
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		

	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Albin</u> [1795: 521-22]: The first to record this sheela, calling it “a very rude but ancient piece of sculpture, over the keystone of the north door,” (cited in Hutchinson 1969: 237).</p> <p>b) <u>Pevsner</u> [1967: 102-3]: Does not mention the sheela or the doorway she is on.</p> <p>c) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 237]: Say the arch the sheela is on is a “displaced Norman arch”. By 1816 the figure was still over the north door, (they cite Englefield, who observed that the figure did not look as though it were in original situ), and by 1891 it had been removed to become an entrance gate to the churchyard. The Hutchinsons think the figure may well have been over the north door originally, citing Albin for evidence as stating that “it was restored to its ancient situation” [Hutchinsons 1969: 237]. The Hutchinsons see the ‘ram’s horns’ as being the legs of the sheela, being “thin and inconspicuous, curving round from the back of the figure underneath the forearms, the feet directed toward each other” [p. 239]. I would say that this is not at all clearly so.</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 140]: With photo; “ ... the arms are clearly preserved, the forearms being almost horizontal and directed towards the genitalia, now very weathered. The legs are thin and inconspicuous. The head is very large, but now devoid of features. The animal head below the figure, with paw-like projections on either side of the head, appears related to Romanesque corbel motifs, and this suggests a 12th century date.” However, I add that whilst this might be true for the ‘ram’ image, as the sheela is probably of a different sculptural piece, it cannot be assumed that the sheela is C12th.</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: Mentions that the church is close to Quarr Abbey. No description of the sheela; with a very inaccurate drawing.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 156]: Say the sheela is squatting “with her hands pointing towards a deep hole-like vulva”. With a drawing that suggests the artist may have visited this sheela; although more accurate it is still quite a vague interpretation (with facial features drawn in which do not exist).</p>
	Other information / comments	


6 & 7	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Mary the Virgin, Bridlington Priory / East Riding, Yorkshire Away from the town 26 July 2001 Priory church Sheela A: I was unable to locate the figure referred to by Andersen, which is on a fragment of C12th colonnading kept in the NW section of the nave. 'Sheela' B: However, I did find what I thought at the time was the 'sheela', and may in fact be a second sheela (although unlikely). It is certainly not recorded, whatever it is. The figure is located in the S aisle, at the base of a spandrel joining the W wall with the S wall, to the S side of the W window. At the opposite spandrel to her is another carving of foliage. 30-35 feet ? ?	 <p>B</p>
	Description of sheela	Could not do a proper description of this figure as I could not get close enough to it, and it was dark. The photo above has to suffice for a description; however, the figure is unlikely to be a sheela, due to the presence of hair, and the style of the head and facial characteristics. It is not certain that the vulva is being displayed, so as an exhibitionist image it is even questionable, although this seems a more plausible classification. The head is in proportion to the main body, although the arms are hugely out of proportion. The figure is in a squatting position, legs wide apart (possibly heels together), and her hands appear to be gesturing towards her vulval area. Breasts may be evident.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	A number of beast's heads along the string-course of the W wall, interior above the main W wall.	
	Architectural history	Lamb's [1976] church guide gives a good history of the Priory. There has been a parish church at Bridlington since at least AD 750. The Priory Church itself was founded in AD 1113 (Augustinian), and the monastery dissolved in AD 1539. All the Priory buildings were destroyed in AD 1539 except the nave and bayle (the massive gateway to the SW of the Priory). Richard Pollard's 1537 survey, conducted for Henry VIII, showed the Priory Church to be second in physical size in Yorkshire to York Minster, measuring more than 390 feet in length. The present church was	

		<p>restored between 1846-1879, and 1945-52, although complete restoration was still continuing during the 1980s, finalised recently.</p> <p>Lamb says of the cloister arcading: "Fragments of the cloisters found in the churchyard have been reconstructed and erected here [in the north aisle] ... All the capitals and arches are original but in some places new shafts have been used. This twin-shafted arcade shows some of some of the finest stone carving of the period 1175-1200. The variety of detail, the undercut interlacing in the refinement of the design, the curious variation of the scalloped capitals treated like folds of linen edged with pearl ornaments make the arcading one of the most interesting and beautiful of its kind and period in the country. A cast of a complete section of the arcading ... has been placed in the Metropolitan Museum of New York" [1976: 21].</p> <p>Earnshaw's [n.d., but possibly 1980s] report of the Priory buildings is largely based on the survey made by Richard Pollard and on excavations of 1926/29 under the supervision of Dr. J.S. Purvis. Earnshaw says of the cloister: "The position of the cloister roof is still to be found in the exterior wall of the south nave aisle. There are many fragments of the cloister to be seen in the north porch and some of these have been reconstructed within the present nave. From these remains, it is evident that the cloister was built during the late 12th century and the arches were highly ornamented [n.d. : 20].</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>Sheela A:</p> <p>a) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969]: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141]: Quotes from Pevsner [1972: 197] for the location of the figure, although Pevsner does not mention the sheela at all]: "in the N aisle, re-erected, stand assembled parts of the C12 cloister, with the typical twin colonnettes placed in depth and with much zigzag, sumptuous capitals, and foliated hoodmoulds with head-stops". Andersen adds, "The figure spans the narrow space between the west end pair of colonnettes. It has thin arms joined in a gesture towards the abdomen, and pudenda are [sic] clearly indicated. In spite of the delicate size of the figure, one shoulder is powerfully moulded and pushed forward. The figure may be dated from its context to the mid-twelfth century (refers here to Webb, G. <i>Architecture in Britain: the Middle Ages</i>, 1956, plate 55 illustrating the arcading), or to a slightly later period c.1175, suggested by the surrounding capitals, scalloped and treated to look like folds of linen." Photo of the figure on p. 44, shows it to be badly weathered, but definitely suggestive of being a</p>


		<p>sheela.</p> <p>c) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 20]: “In the reconstructed Priory Church at Bridlington is a 12th century cloister with well decorated colonnettes at the western end of which can be found the Sheela-na-Gig. She is depicted with thin arms joined towards the abdomen and with clearly defined pudenda. One shoulder is powerful looking, pushed forward.” No drawing.</p> <p>d) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 156]: “This figure is situated in the late twelfth-century cloister of the reconstructed priory church at Bridlington ...”. The description is the same as in the earlier Roberts’ reference. There is a very vague drawing; I do not think Roberts or McMahon have visited this sheela. Their description of the location is entirely incorrect, and the description of the sheela is based on Andersen’s.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>I need to return to record colonnade sheela.</p> <p>However, the presence of a possible sheela in an English C12th cloister environment, where monks would contemplate and pray, suggests that the image was not considered ‘offensive’ or didactic, but perhaps more an aid to meditation. In the words of a modern contemplative monk, such imagery may be used “to open up the inner self of the contemplative, to incorporate the senses and the body in the totality of the self-orientation to God that is necessary for worship and for meditation” [Merton 1973: 106].</p>

8	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	All Saints church, Buckland Buckinghamshire 1 August 2001 Parish church Exterior, S wall, at the E end, above and to right of Gothic-style priest's door c.8' Secondary Sheela is chalk	
	Description of sheela	Carved on a chalk block, the block measuring 16" tall x c. 11" wide, and the figure fills this. Not in proportion. Head: heart-shaped, and sits directly on torso. Eyes, nose, mouth: all clearly visible. The mouth is open, deeply carved, almost 'laughing', and definitely smiling. Torso: straight and thin. Shoulders and arms: large shoulders with arms that are fairly straight. Unusual feature is that shoulders and arms are detached from torso, hanging separate from the main body. Hands: both hands go into the vulva. Fingers of both hands are clearly visible, although more so on her left hand. Vulva: large, and may have been made larger over time. It is c. 2"-3" in depth. Legs: not visible, but it is possible that the legs were originally either side of the large vulva, as there is a possible out-turned foot at her right.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	1) The rest of the S wall, exterior, has various bits of window fragments visible. 8) Tower has gargoyles (probably C19th). 3) Interior: possible Norman round pillars with Gothic arches.	
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Pevsner</u> [1960: 77]: Does not mention the sheela. b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141]: with photo. Quotes from the Royal Commission's inventory [1912] which also dates the church to C13th: "In S wall of nave. Outside, fragments of old worked stone, including damaged corbels, pieces of window tracery, and a stone having rude carving of half-	

		<p>figure with uplifted arms ...". Andersen thinks the Royal Commission 'misread' the figure, "as the carving more likely represents a female with heavy shoulders pulled up about the head (cf. Bilton). Fingers are shown lightly incised around a depressed area in the abdomen, indicating genitalia. The incision may be a secondary feature, after mutilation (rubbing?) of the lower half of the carving."</p> <p>Reference: Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. <i>An inventory of the historical monuments in Buckinghamshire</i>, 1912, v.1: 68.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]. on distribution map [p.128] as type 5 (i.e. an anomalous figure), in List 'A' England and Wales [p.116], and photo [p.121, credited to J. & C. Bord].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 19]: with exceedingly inaccurate drawing. He quotes Andersen as above, ("Fingers are shown lightly incised ... genitalia"), and that the figure seems to have suffered from constant rubbing.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 157]: with much more accurate drawing. It would seem likely that the authors have visited this site for this publication's entry. "The Sheela-na-Gig is above the Priest's Door of the old parish church of All saints just off the Aylesbury to Tring road. She has large shoulders coming over her head and her arms hang down. Lightly cut long fingers surround a sunken indentation, indicating the genitalia show evidence of constant rubbing."</p>
	Other information / comments	

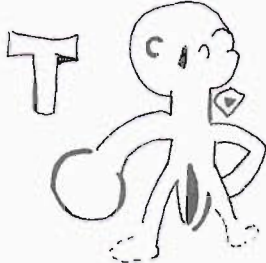

9	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	<p>All Saints chapel, Buncton West Sussex Off A283 Steyning to Storrington road, to the north, at Water Lane. 30 July 2001 Church Interior, on a capital at the S side of the chancel arch, like a label stop on the central face. The equivalent one on opposite side has been replaced and is plain. c. 11' Secondary</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>Horizontally inserted, and carved in relief, this sheela is quite a small figure, 9" tall x 2.5" wide. She is in proportion: head c. 1.5" long and legs from vulva area measure c. 4" long. Head: round top, sides are quite flat, and squared-off jaw / chin. Eyes and nose: visible. Nose is triangular shape, wider at bottom. Mouth: faintly visible, either a straight line or slightly down-turned. Definitely not smiling. Neck: short and thin. Shoulders, with thin arms resting at sides of body. Both hands rest on uppermost part of thighs. Breasts: very tiny but visible, small, raised, and round. Hands: 3 fingers very clearly visible on her left hand, and 4 on her right, though less clear. Legs: fairly straight with slight indication of knees. Feet face outwards to the sides. No toes visible. Vulva: not visible at all. But there are signs of scratchings in and below this area, so there may have been a vulva which has been defaced. From the extent of the scratch marks it may have hung as low as to just above the knees.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>Above the sheela is a ball carved in relief, and above this a partial circle with three small ball-shapes in relief, similar to the larger one below. In between these two pieces of iconography is an incised image of a circle with hatched pattern, to the left of which is an abstract design of two triangles placed base to base, with a line going down from the tip of the lower triangle, with an inverted 'V' at the bottom [do diagram here].</p>	
	Architectural history	<p>Architectural history is puzzling. The chancel arch has clearly had sculptural embellishment originally (there is still one small piece of it in situ to the left and above the sheela). Norman nave, chancel, S doorway (blocked-up), and some windows. Roman tiles in external wall from</p>	

		<p>nearby Roman villa. External N wall has triple blind arcading, which may have come from Sele Priory (Beeding), after it was closed down in C15th (alien priory with mother house in France). The sheela may also have come from here, as it looks like the chancel arch may originally have been plain and then had two thin columns and the sheela capital added later. Pevsner [1965: 120] says: "Unrestored Norman nave and chancel ... tall Norman nave with tiny windows very high up, probably C11. Short, tall chancel with lancets and a C14 E window. An extraordinary set of arches built into the outside wall on the N side. Where do they come from? Equally inexplicable the various blocked arches on the S side of the nave, inside ... S of the church Manor Farm is a good unrestored C15 or C16 farm, plastered and tile-hung. Originally moated." No mention of the sheela.</p> <p>In the electronic Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture, Morrison [see main bibliography] only refers to the sheela as "a horizontal human figure".</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	On a hill, by a stream, and close to Chanctonbury Ring (hill fort).
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161]; not on distribution map, but in List 'A' England and Wales, drawn to their attention by George Zarnecki, "it is situated on the north impost of the Romanesque chancel arch, and is much 'rubbed' in the genital area".</p> <p>b) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 157]: with meagre drawing. They take their information entirely from J. Harding's website. "A slim female with small breasts, pulling her vulva ... Weir conjectures that she has been deliberately rubbed before entering the building but the figure is so high it could not have been casually rubbed, although there are definite scratches around the genital area". They do not point out that the figure is in secondary situ, and the scratches are definitely obliterations of the once-very-long vulva, perhaps carried out when she was inserted into this situ.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>According to the information board in the church, the site probably goes back to c. AD 791 – a record of a grant of land for the church of St Andrew at Ferring. This agreement was transacted on the hill called 'Biohchandoune', which means 'Birch Down' found in Domesday as 'Botechitoune'. The locality is quite possible being a few miles from Ferring and from Bramber where the Saxon kings had their stronghold. The suggestion is that the church was originally a Saxon hall.</p>

10	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Lawrence / Church Stretton / Shropshire Town setting 23 July 2001 Parish church External, above Romanesque N doorway c. 16' Probably primary Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	<p>c. 18" tall x 9" wide, carved in relief on a block of sandstone. She appears to be seated. Head: roughly in proportion to rest of body, perhaps slightly bigger. Very round head but comes in quite sharply for chin. Not very well-defined facial features. No hair or ears visible. Eyes, nose, mouth all quite close together. Her left eye is not visible now. Nose: quite triangular and broad near base. Neck: shown. Shoulders and arms: clearly visible and carved. Arms bend in at elbows, with hands going across lower abdomen, above vulva. Looks like there have been fingers. The figure is holding her rotund belly – not pointing to the vagina area. Breasts: possibly shown, may be in the arm-pits. Legs: knees facing straight out away from body towards the front, parallel to one another. Definite ankles, bent, with parallel feet facing forwards. Vulva: indicated by a long lozenge-shaped hole that has been filled with a stone, or it may be just that the shape of the vulva has been incised in outline, leaving the stone uncarved within.</p> <p>She has been inserted into this wall at some point but it does look as though the stones around her have been made to incorporate her.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Double-flower sculpted stone below her to her left (with another eroded one as part of label stop of doorway, to sheela's left and below). Also, immediately below her and slightly to her left is a very eroded, weathered stone 'piece' above the doorway in the centre, which obviously was a carved 'something', impossible now to discern.	
	Architectural history	Quite a large church. Originally ?Saxon (Saxon stone coffin in graveyard).	

		The tower has a good number of grotesques on it, and gargoyles.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: “ ... another badly weathered example ... may be of the same class as the one at Oaksey.”</p> <p>b) <u>Pevsner</u> [1958: 100]: “The north doorway has two rolls in the arch (and a sheila-na-gig above).”</p> <p>c) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 244]: “Outside on the N wall of the church a fairly weathered standing sheela of Type Ic, probably about two feet high. In a photograph most kindly sent to us by the Rev. William H. Wilson, it is seen to be set rather asymmetrically above the Norman arch of a door in the north wall of the nave. (FRSAI, 1894a; Hemp 1938, fig).” Interesting that they should not see it is clearly a seated figure.</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141]: In his gazetteer, with photograph, quotes from Horrocks [1971: 8]: “Also on the outside wall, above this [N] door, is a very old carving of a human figure – a pagan fertility symbol known as a Sheila-na-Gig. This door used to be known as the corpse door, as it was apparently used only for bringing in the dead’. Round face with naively carved and incised features. Rod-like body and neck, with small arms and hands joined in a gesture towards the abdomen. Unusually heavy legs, with protruding knees and big feet. Genitalia outlined. H. c. 60cm. References Pevsner [<u>Shropshire</u>, 1958: 100]; Horrocks, A.H., 1971, <i>Story of the St Lawrence parish church, Church Stretton</i>. Gloucester: [?]; and Hutchinson.</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p. 161]; on distribution map [p. 128], described as a figure “with both hands only indicating the pudenda”; in List A, England and Wales.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 157-8]: “Directly above the north door to the church dedicated to St Lawrence ... is a Sheela carved in a niche-like depression. It is recorded that this doorway was reserved for bringing in the dead” [although they do not say by whom]. “She is quite similar in appearance to the figure from Oaksey ... but is in a sitting position and has huge protruding knees and large feet. She also has very clearly outlined genitalia and it appears as if a lighter coloured stone has been inserted in this area. (60cm high)”.</p>

		g) <u>Grounds</u> [2002: 13]: says of the sheela “there is no doubt that it is an early fertility figure”; and “The ‘sheila-na-gig’ ... at Stretton confirms that there were still those who put at least some of their trust in other deities” [2002: 4]. Grounds clearly sees sheelas representing the continued existence of paganism into the early Christian period, and thus sees the sheelas as a much earlier than C12th piece of imagery. This is a common fallacy in the popular literature, and on the websites. It is rather disheartening, but highly indicative (of a lack of proper research and of a need to place sheelas in such a category), that authors are still seeing sheelas in these terms.
	Other information / comments	The literature seems to indicate that other authors think this sheela is in secondary situ (due to being placed asymmetrically above the doorway). Could be a birthing sheela (sitting on a birthing stool?). The face / head shape of this sheela is very similar to the example at Fiddington.


11	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Michael and All Angels church, Copgrove North Yorkshire Small, rural village 25 July 2001 Parish church Removed in 1999 from exterior NE corner of N wall (Victorian extension) to interior S wall of nave, near the corner with the chancel Not relevant as ex-situ At least secondary The figure is made of millstone grit	 <p>Outline sketch</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>The block of stone the sheela is on measures 16" tall x 18" wide; the figure is c. 12" tall. Head: 4" long, and thus disproportionately large to the rest of her body. The body is thin and spindly. Face: details are not clearly visible, but I could feel the shape of the mouth (smiling). Indentations where eyes and nose are. Possible left ear. Neck: 2" long. No shoulders. Arms: come straight out from top of torso below neck. Her left arm is bent at the elbow and comes in again to her left thigh area. Hands: visible. Her right hand holds a disc / circular object. Her left hand goes across her left thigh to touch the huge vulva which is hanging down. Vulva: is very well demarcated and is 3.5" long, over a quarter of the total height of the figure. Legs: her right is clearly visible, and goes straight down; her left is weathered with the lower half missing.</p> <p>There is a 'T' shape to the sheela's immediate right at her head-height, and possibly another shape to the left of her neck.</p>		
	Other sculpture/decoration	Chancel arch has herring-bone design (Norman). Exterior window to S wall of chancel has very weathered carvings at each label stop. Very plain little church.		
	Architectural history	Chancel arch dates to c. AD1100. The church was restored in the C19th.		
	Other features			

	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u>: Not in.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141]: Says (taking his information from an undated church leaflet) a new vestry was added in 1897, which was when a ““carved stone, thought to be of Romano-British origin, was moved from the North chancel wall and included in the North east corner of the new exterior wall’. The figure is flatly carved in a niche-like depression. Broomstick neck supporting a large, round head, with features now indistinct except for round depressions indicating eyes. Most clearly preserved are the armpits, and a straight r. leg. The l. arm is bent towards the vulva, indicated by a large slit, nearly 6cm long, clear at the top, blurred below. The l. leg is worn away. Attributes consisting of a circular disc (diam. 7.5cm) held in the right hand of the figure. Above her r. shoulder is a capital ‘T’ (Terra?), 10cm high. Measurements of slab 40 x 47.5 cm, figure H. 31.5cm, W. 26cm.” Photograph: p. 127. No refs.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p. 161]; on distribution map [p. 128], class 4; List A England and Wales [p. 116].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 20]: Takes description from Andersen, but adds “Most remarkable is the fact that [in] her right hand she holds the sacred sun-symbol, a disc recalling the disc held by the ‘Guardian of the Well’ Sheela-na-Gig at Fethard.” No drawing.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 158]: with fairly vague drawing. They have not recently visited this site as they say: “The figure is now on the north-east corner of the late Victorian extension, having been removed from the north chancel of the old church in 1897.” They re-iterate the description again from Andersen: “ ... has a thin neck, a large round head, no breasts ... left arm reaches down to a large slit vulva ... the one leg that is not worn is straight.” They mention the disc and the ‘T’, and say the figure was carved on a quoin stone.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>There was a ‘sacrifice post’ in the lane at the N side of the church where criminals were hanged, presumably medieval period onwards. Also to the N side c. 100m from the church is a Roman road, with the lane in front of this.</p> <p>Copgrove used to be called ‘Copgrave’. [These pieces of information provided verbally by Robert Addyman].</p>




		<p>3) Early (possibly Romanesque or even Saxon) weathered, red sandstone carved tomb-slab or part of cross, to W end of N wall (interior), with Celtic knotwork design and others (difficult to discern).</p> <p>4) First Gothic arch of S aisle has carved human heads (not kings or bishops) where it meets column top.</p> <p>5) 2 octagonal columns in S aisle, and 2 in N aisle also.</p> <p>6) There is the head of a king where arches 1 and 2 of S aisle meet, with head of a bishop above.</p>
	Architectural history	<p>The church guide book [Chaytor 1989] states that there are traces of two Anglo-Saxon tombstone crosses, one on the inside of the N wall, and a fragment in the E window of the N aisle, supporting my description above and indicating that the original church here may have been Saxon. The first written reference (from tithe payments by the lords of the Manor) to the church here dates to AD1120.</p> <p>In the early C12th the church would probably have been aisleless, consisting of just nave and chancel. The oldest (Norman) part of the present church is in the W wall of the nave where the W door has been blocked up. Mid-C13th S aisle added to the nave and a NE chapel built onto the chancel. In the late C19th the church underwent major restoration.</p> <p>The S doorway is late C13th with a continuous arch of two orders. Chaytor mentions the sheela as “a small human figure with right arm raised over his head and left arm down and across the body. One authority claims it to be a local water deity of Romano-British origin c. C1st-C5th AD. However, this may be a piece of Victorian piety for it is possible to see that a part of the anatomy has been chipped out of the navel thus indicating that he is more likely to be a fertility god. Certainly the position this little figure adopts is similar to those of Greek fertility gods” [pp.29 & 31].</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	The church is right by the River Tees, which is behind it at the E end.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u>: Not in</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141]: With photograph, states Croft is in Durham, near Darlington. “A standing female on a slab set in the wall immediately inside the S entrance of the church. Large head but with no neck indicated to connect it with the large body and the small legs turned out. Broad, powerfully raised shoulders. The r. arm is raised above the head, and the l. hand is shown reaching towards the abdomen, and carved in one piece with it.”</p>

		<p>Andersen also states [p.122] that this sheela's gesture of the right hand above the head suggests "some moral headache, some depreciation about the life led by sheelas". No previous references stated by Andersen, so he is probably the first to record this sheela.</p> <p>c) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.161], on distribution map [p.128], type 4, and in list A England and Wales [p.116].</p> <p>d) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 20]: States the sheela is in Durham at 'Crofton on Tees', is set into the wall inside the south entrance to the church, and has a spartan drawing.</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 158]: Still stated as being in Durham at 'Crofton-on-Tees', with better (although not accurate) drawing. They repeat Andersen's description in brief, omitting mention of the large body and head, and small legs, but adding "the left hand is clearly shown reaching towards the top of the vulva." The breasts are not depicted in their drawing, but the belly button is.</p>
	Other information / comments	

13	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Martin, Fiddington Somerset Tiny village 3 August 2001 External, on a quoin stone at SE corner of nave. The figure is close to the chancel end of the nave, and near the priest's door. c. 11' Probably secondary; although there are 4 other red sandstone quoins, most are not of this stone on this corner. Red sandstone	
	Description of sheela	Carved in relief on a quoin stone block which is c. 13.5" high x 14" wide. The figure itself is c. 11.5" tall x c. 11.5" wide from toe to toe. Head: very round, almost a perfect circle, which is slightly disproportionate to the body (c. 4" long with body measuring 11" from top of head to bottom of torso). Ears: visible. Her right has a small pointed leaf shape, almost ass-like or pig-like; her left is larger and is at a lower angle than her right, and it cuts across the left arm. Face: has furrow lines on forehead. Eyes: close-set, fairly rounded and protruding. Nose: tiny, button-shaped. Mouth: small, smiling, quite deeply incised, half a lemon-slice shape. Neck: slight neck indicated. Arms: Her right arm comes out at the shoulder, bends at the elbow and comes down with the right hand appearing to rest on her bent right knee. Her left arm goes straight up into the air by the left side of her face. It is hard to see where it ends, but her left hand may be holding something. Torso: thin, parallel-sided. Belly button: clearly visible, and in centre of torso. Vulva: shown as a vertical incised line, but it is not totally clear as lower part of the body has been defaced. Legs: bent at hips, very widely apart, facing outwards. Legs are also bent at the knees with feet facing outwards.	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history	Rectors go back as far as AD 1316. All windows are Victorian [although Aston states that the windows in the S wall of the nave are C14th]. Church restored in 1977. It is questionable whether the exterior S wall of the nave is Saxon / Norman. Aston [1979]	


		suggests there is evidence for herringbone stonework 1-1.5m. above ground level; he, therefore, posits that the quoin stone the sheela is on may well be contemporary with this herringbone work. However, Pevsner [1958] states that the entire nave and chancel are Victorian, and therefore the sheela could have been re-inserted at this time.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Dobson</u> [1930]: with photograph.</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 245]: "A figure ... believed to be male by Dobson [1930] on account of the absence of breasts but evidently a sheela of Guest's type II, with the left arm raised." They say the published photograph is not entirely satisfactory and a re-examination would be desirable. They do not include a photograph.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 141-2]: with poor photograph. Not a very accurate or full description by Andersen: "A quoin figure on an outside S wall of St Martin's church. The posture is near-seated with knees widely splayed and one foot touching the edge of the stone. The r. arm of the figure held away from the body, and the left arm is raised up by the head." Andersen draws a parallel [p.120-1] between this sheela and the example at Kiltinane church, saying they both demonstrate "watchfulness by a corner of the building". He sees the 'hand behind the ear' as a 'listening' gesture, although he does not state that the Fiddington sheela actually has ears. It is more the gesture of the hand being up at that part of the head from which he infers the activity of 'listening'. References: Man, 1930, no. 8; Hutchinson, no. 18.</p> <p>d) <u>Aston</u> [1979]: with drawing that omits the ears and includes 4 depressions down the middle of the torso. He describes the figure more fully than Andersen but is not precise, e.g. "one arm is raised, the other is resting on the knee" [p.113]. He says from ground level the figure appears to be male, but that "closer examination reveals the usual enlarged female genitalia of these figures." As the figure is not high up, this does not seem very plausible. He says the head, and parts of the arms and feet are clearly demarcated, but that the body, hands and legs, as well as the genitalia are very poorly represented, attributing this to deliberate damage, especially to the lower left-hand side of the figure. He concludes that this may have been done "to disguise the erotic nature of the figure". He suggests that an C11th or C12th date for the church is a possibility, but does not support this with any architectural evidence.</p>

		<p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Not in gazetteer, nor on distribution map, but it is included in their List 'A' England and Wales [p.116] with a minimal reference to the Aston article in brackets after this, but not in their bibliography.</p> <p>f) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: with poor drawing. No new insights are provided. "The Sheela-na-Gig that can be found on a corner stone of St Martin's church is somewhat weathered but can be seen to portray a seated figure with one arm raised and the other pointing to her thigh."</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 161]: with a drawing that resembles Aston's drawing more closely than the actual figure itself. No indication of ears. They would appear to repeat much of what Aston says in his article. An added 'observation' is that they state there are "worn traces of three or possible four round circles " extending from the sheela's lower stomach to her chest. They also say the figure is contemporary with the rest of the S wall of the nave. I am suspicious that they have not visited this site at all, and have merely repeated (and misinterpreted) Aston's comments.</p>
	Other information / comments	The ears of this figure have been totally ignored by previous authors. Is there some significance to them? Why is one of them seemingly ass-like? Is there a connection with the medieval concept of the Fool?

14	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Haddon Hall Derbyshire Small stately home 27 July 2001 Private stately home Currently on a wall inside the old stable block which now houses the lavatories. She is not well displayed in her new location, being partially obscured by the old wooden manger rail. c. 15' At least secondary Possibly gritstone for the sheela – looks like the same stone used for the lower part of the stable wall	
	Description of sheela	An unusual sheela (if a sheela at all), in relief on a roughly round stone that measures c. 16" high x 18" wide. She does not conform to any of the usual sheela styles, with her legs right up in the air either side of her head. The arms are not apparently attached to the rest of the body, more stylised, coming somewhere from the sides, but hands clearly visible going into and holding open the vulva. Head: long and narrower at the top than at the bottom, rather like a potato. Eyes: quite close together. Nose: quite naturalistic. Mouth: Large, and smiling. Hair: none. Ears: none. Torso: no part of her torso is visible, so it appears her head is resting on top of her pudenda with the vulva shown below. Vulva: not easy to describe fully as difficult to see due to obscuring position, but the area above the vulva is 'lumpy', and the hands quite clearly go into the vulva. Arms: her right arm is damaged, but the hand is clearly visible with either 4 fingers or 3 fingers and a thumb shown; her left arm is complete and the hand is clearer than her right, with 4 fingers shown (no thumb). This figure does look as though it is meant to be viewed from below.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	None	
	Architectural history	In 1170, the Hall comprised the Great Hall, the kitchen, the chapel, and the watch tower. The chapel was restored in 1624. The stable block dates to C17th and is situated to the N, outside the interior enclosure of the Hall, with the main entrance to the Hall at ESE of stables. The NW tower of the main entrance is C15th and has some grotesques on it. The tower of Screen's Passage (which is located inside the inner quadrangle area) also has grotesques.	


Other features	The chapel was originally built as the parish church of Nether Haddon, dedicated to St Nicholas in the late C12th. There's a small Norman font with a carved head on it which has quite small Celtic-style ears and Celtic shape to the head. The chapel is covered in wall paintings from 1420s. There is one round Norman column remaining.
Topography	The stables are very close to the river and bridge. The river is W of the stables.
Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: with photograph. "A figure above the doorway of the Elizabethan stables on the estate." Quotes Pevsner [1953: 142] who says the bridge dates to 1663 and that the stables are C16th "with their odd decoration by a sheila-na-gig". Andersen thinks the figure is likely to be late, "a somewhat comic figure with its legs raised to a level above the head. Both legs appear to continue along the outer rim of the slab. They then develop into long arms and terminate in hands joined in gesture around the genitals, grotesquely rendered in the form of a square (originally cross-shaped?) depression. Toes are indicated on the r. foot." He dates it to c. AD1600. The only reference is Pevsner.</p> <p>b) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.162], on distribution map [p.128] as type 1 (but with query) and given a late C17th date by them; in List A England and Wales [p.116].</p> <p>c) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 20]: with inaccurate drawing. "This figure was placed above the doorway to the stables on an Elizabethan estate, a 'somewhat comic figure' with her legs awkwardly above the head and twisting down to form arms that open the vulva." Roberts has taken his description from Andersen and the drawing looks as though it has been derived from Andersen's photograph. They have incorrectly stated that the estate is Elizabethan.</p> <p>d) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 161]: with better drawing, but still not accurate, i.e. the legs, and particularly arms, are not as well defined as it is possible to see by eye. They repeat that the estate is Elizabethan, and add that the stables were built around 1600. They also state that the figure has been moved to the inside of the stable to prevent further weathering; this is interesting as the figure is not mentioned at all in the Hall's guide book. We can thus deduce that the figure must have been moved to inside the stables between 1976 and 2000. Another extra piece of information provided by McMahon & Roberts is that the figure is said to have been found originally in a field nearby. They refer to the "hands reaching from below to pull open the well-marked vulva which is shown as a square-shaped hollow", and cite Andersen [p.142] for this.</p>

	Other information / comments	<p>This was a prestigious home, and, therefore, as with tower houses in Ireland, there may be a link between demonstrating status and power and having a sheela displayed on your property. The 'sheela' may have come from the chapel and been removed to the stable block when the chapel was renovated, as those dates fit. However, this 'sheela' does not look at all Romanesque, so it could be that it is simply C17th, and placed above the doorway then. This would support my notion that sheelas were by then seen as apotropaic in a very limited sense of protection, possibly even as a sort of 'emblem' rather than as a deeply-imbued sacred and powerful object.</p> <p>By being placed where she currently is, it is almost a place to hide her. Being placed by the toilets means people quickly leave and enter the stable block, and do not notice her. There is no notice near her to make you aware of her existence, nor is she mentioned in the guide book. You have to know about her – nobody else appeared to notice her as I was making my notes.</p>
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15	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Holy Trinity Church Holdgate / Shropshire Small village 23 July 2001 Norman church Exterior, E end of S wall, to left of a Gothic window c. 15' ? Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	Head: very long. Large in relation to rest of body, almost half size of entire body. Quite sad-looking. Dome-shaped top of head. No hair. No neck – head just sits on torso. Eyebrows: angled up at inner brows. Eyes: large, lozenge-shaped. Nose: damaged but looks like it was thin. Cheeks: look blown- or puffed-out. Mouth: very peculiar; 2 round holes, quite big. Ears: shown half way down sides of head, but naturalistic shape if not position. Small shoulders. Arms: come down sides of body to go under legs with hands clearly shown going into vulva. Vulva: pulled wide open by hands. Large lozenge-shaped vulva. Legs: knees are pulled right up to chest [similar to Taghmon and Abbeylara]. Breasts: none evident.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<u>Exterior:</u> Tower has 2 gargoyles on S wall, and one head on W wall (that is not a waterspout). The 4 tower turrets have carving: the 2 facing S have Celtic patterns on their S sides. N side exterior of the church is much plainer: even the tower turret decoration is plainer. No gargoyles on N or E sides of tower. Evidence of old roof-line on E wall of tower: sharper-angled apex. <u>Interior:</u> Font is interesting: 4 carved beast heads at base. Sculpture on font has strong Celtic flavour. May be C11th. Rope-work design round rim, and simple chevron at base.	
	Architectural history	Original Norman window at W wall interior, with tower attached.	
	Other features	Church generally in poor repair inside – dank and crumbling walls.	
	Topography	Church is on raised ground within (?partially) circular enclosure wall. Opposite in the distance	


		to the S is a hill.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: Refers to the site as 'Holgate', and says the figure is " ... a Sheela about a foot high, set rather inaccessibly, in the outer face of the south wall of the church, and partly covered by ivy when the photograph was taken. This figure is carved still more in the round than the Penmon lady, and the general attitude is the same, but the knees are more bent and the hands passed underneath them."</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 244]: "Outside on the south wall of the church, a sheela about 1 foot high, set rather inaccessibly on the wall. It is of Type Ia but with the arms passing behind the thighs as at Kilpeck. (Hemp 1938, fig)."</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: In his gazetteer, with photograph, "Holgate (Holdgate). A figure on the 13th century chancel of Holy Trinity church." Quotes Pevsner [<i>Shropshire</i>, 1858: 152]: "In the chancel S wall, outside, a sheila-na-gig (cf. Tugford).' The sheela, estimated by Hemp to be about 30 cm high, is carved nearly in the round, protruding from the wall. The knees are bent and the hands are passed underneath them. The fingers of both hands are placed on the outer labia, and genitalia are held open in a manner that is most striking and must have been clearly visible from below."</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p. 162]; on distribution map [p. 128], described as a sheela-na-gig "with both hands passed below the thighs from behind, fingers inserted in the vulva"; in List A, England and Wales [p. 116].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 21]: Refers to the site as 'Holgate'. "This Sheela-na-gig protrudes from the wall of the 13th century church of the Holy Trinity. One observer noted that 'the genitalia are held open in a manner that is most striking and must have been clearly visible from below'." Roberts does not reference this quote, but it is obviously from Andersen. No drawing. Clearly not visited by Roberts.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 162]: Taking Andersen's first spelling in calling it 'Holgate', they say "This Sheela-na-Gig is carved almost in the round and protrudes from the south wall of the thirteenth-century church of the Holy Trinity. The hands pass underneath the bent knees and the fingers of both hands hold open the outer labia to reveal the genitalia in a clearly visible manner. An unusual feature are [<i>sic</i>] two round deep holes in the place of the mouth. (30 cm high)". No description of other sculpture is given. And they assume the whole church is C13th, based presumably on Andersen's date for the chancel. A drawing is presented here though, suggesting that McMahon has visited the site.</p>

	Other information / comments	
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16	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) Townland / County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Kilpeck Herefordshire Small rural village, SW of Hereford 29 July 2000 Church Exterior. Corbel in corbel table in S. wall, outer chancel, in a corner. c. 14' Primary Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	She is about 10" tall x 8" wide at widest part. Head: disproportionately large to rest of body, being c. 50% of total length. Head is much broader at top coming in to a point for a chin. Nose: quite a bulbous triangle. Eyes: large, almond-shaped, with lines for eyebrows and lines under eyes joining up to encircle eyes completely. Drilled holes for eyeballs / pupils. The eyes are a prominent feature of this sheela. Mouth: closed, indicated by shallow incised line with subtle smile. Neck: none. Body comes straight down from head. Arms: possibly sculpted from a separate piece of stone. The line at each side of the body is clearly chiselled making the arms appear almost as though they are coming from behind the body. Elbows are out at a sharp angle with lower arms going behind knees. Hands: both reach into huge vulva. 4 fingers clearly shown on each hand, but no thumbs. Vulva: Disproportionately large to rest of body. Comes down from beneath torso in a non-naturalistic way. Legs: Lower legs not easy to discern. Knees could be bent with lower legs bent back and to sides. Feet: indicated but not clearly defined.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Sheela has to her left a cat with a beak and something in its mouth. The whole church is richly embellished with magnificent sculptural motifs, with a Scandinavian style. Within this context the sheela is a stark image.	
	Architectural history	Present building commissioned c. AD 1135 by Hugh de Kilpeck, but earlier church c. AD 640, and probable earlier cell of St Pedic.	
	Other features	Doorway below and to left of sheela – simple Gothic style with pointed arch. Small	

		Romanesque window to sheela's left and below her; 4 corbels to her left, none to her right.
	Topography	Church is on raised mound with oval shape (suggesting re-use of pre-Christian site). Saxon village remains in field to NE of church and immediately next to it. Possible Roman courtyard also to NE of church. S. of church are ruins of Norman keep and extensive earthworks of the castle built C11th, c. 100m. away.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Murray</u> [1934: 97]: "The most typical Sheila-na-gig ... the whole emphasis is laid on the genitalia, which are exaggerated out of all proportion to the body. There are no breasts; the arms, unduly long, are passed under the legs".</p> <p>b) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: Does not say very much about the sheela here, that it presents the same "attitude" as at Hol[d]gate and Tugford (quite what that is is not clear), and say the "Kilpeck figure is probably only a manifestation of mediaeval humour".</p> <p>c) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 245]: say the figure is a typical sheela-na-gig of type 1(a) [following Guest's typology, 1936] "but with long arms placed behind the thighs between which the hands emerge to hold the enormously exaggerated labia", and cite Murray's 1934 article and photograph.</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: "A sheela is found in its original setting among the corbels on the outside S. wall of the nave, near the chancel. It is a very characteristic figure of display shown in a crouching posture, with its legs pulled up. The body is very short. The facial features of the big head are stylized in the manner of masks known from Norman decoration. The mouth is suited to the shape of the big flattened nose. The big eyes are set within a rim like goggles and have clearly marked holes indicating the pupils. The hands are passed behind the legs to reappear in front, grabbing and expanding the vulva, leaving it blatantly open to view. C. 1140."</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.162], on distribution map [p.128] as type 1, and List A, England & Wales [p.116]. Photograph [p.16] with caption: "The fact that it is not entirely human is significant. Either the sculptor was embarrassed (not likely) or he meant to portray the act as beastly." Presumably they mean the act of exhibiting the vulva.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 162]: State the figure is " ... in its original setting", but add nothing to above descriptions.</p>
	Other comments /information	Given the wealth of this church as manifested in its wonderful sculptural embellishment, the presence of a sheela as part of the 'repertoire' (and, here, it can be said to be so) might


		indicate a status symbol. I suggest that a sheela is an indication of, or represents, the power of that church (and it could well be spiritual power rather than material wealth), or of the benefactor who commissioned the sculpture.
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17	<p>Site Townland/County General location</p> <p>Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology</p>	<p>Llandrindod Wells Llandrindod Wells / Radnorshire, Wales Ex- situ. Now in museum, having been removed there in 1999, for security, from previous location of a window ledge in the old parish church, after having been dug up from under the floor of the church, allegedly the threshold floor of main doorway.</p> <p>22 July 2001 Probably church Uncertain N/A Ex-situ Shale with mica inclusions</p>	
	<p>Description of sheela</p>	<p>The block of stone the sheela is carved into is c. 22” tall x 20” wide. Head: Disproportionately large to rest of body. Round at top, possible indication of band of hair across ver top of head. Incised lines coming down onto top of head from top of stone block. Incised furrow lines to brow. Ears: Small, handle-like. Her right ear has something else above it (a smaller ear-like shape). Eyes: incised, small, slit-like. Nose: long, quite slender, with 2 small nostrils. 3 incised lines coming down from under nose to top lip. Mouth: open, no actual lips shown, so mouth chiselled out but with very well-defined set of teeth: 10 upper, 9 lower. Chin: well-defined, slightly shifted to sheela’s left of face. Neck: not really shown. Head and shoulders joined. Arms: both come down at sides of body, bend at elbows, and hands come in across pelvic area with fingers of both hands touching vulva. Both hands clearly show thumb and 4 fingers. Breasts: very round and quite small. Both located under armpits, with her right one almost tucked under her right armpit. Belly button: shown as a definite round hole. Ribs: 9 ribs shown on her right side, 7 on her left. Ribs demarcated by simple incised lines. Rib-cage area is rounded, expanded outwards sideways; then a small, nipped-in waist. Legs: bend out from hips, inner legs facing outwards, with knees bent outwards. Her right leg is damaged / missing the lower part. Her left stops at the ankle. Both feet missing.</p> <p>Vulva: clearly shown, but lower part badly damaged. May have been an anus indicated. Possible inner labia shown. Outer labia may have hung down beyond thighs.</p>	

	Other sculpture/decoration	
	Architectural history	<p>2 churches in Llandrindod Wells in records of AD1291: Capel Maelog, and the Old Parish Church.</p> <p>8) <u>Capel Maelog</u>: near the lake. According to the information boards: The foundations of this early church were discovered in 1984 during archaeological excavations for a housing development. This site seems to have been first used as a settlement. In C10th – C12th a small cemetery was established possible inside a small, horse-shoe-shaped enclosure. The first church was probably built late C12th to early C13th, on a simple plan with small, rectangular chancel and nave. In c. C13th, the chancel and W end of nave were demolished and replaced by rounded apses. The church survived in this form until C16th, when it was finally demolished. The earlier church was built of local stone, may have had a thatch or shingle roof, and probably had a single door in S wall of the nave. The later church had apses at both W and E ends, a unique feature in the British Isles.</p> <p>9) <u>Old Parish Church</u>: No history available. It has been completely stripped of medieval sculpture /decoration. All windows are late medieval or C19th replacements. The porch and doorway (under which the sheela was presumably found) are to the S. The church is on a mound on a hill.</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: “ ... found about 1894 buried in the church floor, and is remarkable well preserved. The genitalia are much exaggerated and reach the edge of the stone, the feet are missing. The breasts normal, the head large with pendulous cheeks. The figure is cut in low relief, but the hair is worked over the top edge of the stone; the actual figure is smoothed, but the background still shews long tool marks ... A detail of much interest is the cross crosslet cut in one side of the stone. Unfortunately, the form of this cross does not carry date, but in view of the position in which the figure was found, it is perhaps not too fanciful to guess that at some mediaeval date the lady was looked upon as symbolical of evil, dethroned from a position of prominence, marked with a cross, and buried in the church to keep her out of mischief.” But Hemp clearly states he does not know “the purpose of origin of these figures”, so he is really just guessing.</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 245]: “A figure discovered about 1894, buried below the church floor. A cross crosslet [misquoted from Hemp by H. & H.] was cut on the side of</p>


	<p>the stone; Hemp [1938] suspects this was done to 'slay' the sheela when it was buried in medieval times. The figure is very well preserved. It has a grotesque face with pendulous cheeks, high rounded breasts, well marked ribs, exaggerated genitalia held open, and splayed thighs. The calves of the legs are broken but seem to have converged. It is clearly a form of Guest's Type Ia. The large ears may be compared with those of the Binstead figure and with those of the Irish examples mentioned above", i.e. earlier in their article. In addition to Hemp, they refer to the FRSAI list of 1894.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: In his gazetteer, with photograph: "A figure found c. 1894 buried in the floor of the church. It is cut in low relief, and carved into one side of the thick slab is an added 'cross crosslet'. The posture is standing or half-seated with the legs splayed. The hands are joined around the pudenda. Incised ribs, and small breasts set high. Big head with pendulous or baggy cheeks, and an open slit of mouth. A rim of hair is indicated, with the incised strands worked over the top edge of the stone. The figure is smoothed, whereas the background has been left rough, showing long tool marks. The calves of the legs are broken, but they seem to have converged. The large ears are a noticeable feature."</p> <p>References to Hemp [1938: 136], and Hutchinson [above].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.162]; on distribution map [p.128] described as a figure "with both hands passed in front to touch the pudenda"; in List A, England and Wales [p.116],; and full page black & white photograph [p.115, credited to Martin Pover & Brian Branston].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 15]: Says the figure can be found at the old church in Llandrindod Wells, which of course is now not true, as it was moved in 2000 [see below], and that it is an important British sheela-na-gig, but adds nothing else. Very poor drawing.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 168]: "This is one of the best examples of a Sheela-na-Gig in Britain and is said to have been found 'on October 24, 1894, concealed and built into the north wall of the church, face downwards, in pulling it down for rebuilding.' [They reference Hemp 1938: 136, but the quote is completely incorrect.] The figure has incised ribs, large ears and breasts set almost under the armpits. The tool markings are very clear on the figure and show that it may have been buried at some early date" [why?]. "Incised marks worked over the top of the forehead may indicate a hair [sic] or perhaps tattooing. A cross crosslet has been carved on one side of the thick stone slab, obviously at the time</p>
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		<p>of burial. The church where it was found is dated 1746 but there are traces of an earlier church nearby called Llanfaelog [<i>sic</i>], named after the sixth-century St Maelog. (75cm x 45cm)".</p> <p>McMahon & Roberts have made assumptions and errors for this entry; the Old Parish Church is not specified by any of the authors, and although the present building may be dated to 1746, it is recorded as existing in documents of AD1291.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>Description in museum with sheela: "Sheela-na-Gig relief. Pagan / early Christian female deity, from the Dark Age period. Carved relief, with a crucifix incised on the right-hand side, possible at a later date to the rest of the carving. Shale with mica inclusions – these probably influenced the mason's choice in using this stone." [Exhibit placed: 2000]</p> <p>Thanks to: Alice Kirby and Heather Pegg in the Radnorshire Museum for their help in connection with recording this sheela.</p> <p>The sheela is likely to have originated from the Capel Maelog church and been reused at the Old Parish Church. There could be a strong Irish connection – the sheela could even be from Ireland, or carved by an Irish mason. The church is known in historical records as 'Llandemaylon'. The original name probably means: the enclosure or church [Llan] of someone called either Maelon – possibly a local saint whose name is other wise unknown – or Maelog, a C6th saint whose name is known elsewhere in Wales. This historical background is very similar to sites in Ireland which later have sheelas associated with them, and Wales and Ireland have a close historical, and geographical, connection.</p> <p>Thus, possible evidence for sheela movement from W to E (as opposed to usual diffusionistic determinism of E to W).</p> <p>Further evidence for this is that although the church has a Welsh name it may have been built during a period of either Norman or Welsh control. Maelienydd, the ancient territory in which it lies, was in the hands of various Welsh princes until the later C11th when the region was first annexed by the Normans. But it was another 200 years before Norman control was finally established in the late C13th.</p>

18	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	All Saints church, Oaksey Wiltshire Rural village location 7 May 2001 C15th or C16th Church: nave, chancel, single aisle to S, tower at W end. Plain church on exterior. Exterior, N wall at E side of porch, and to right of triple-light ogee-headed window with square lintel c. 15' from base of church wall Secondary Church is probably limestone	
	Description of sheela	Re-inserted to be proud of wall. She is c. 12" tall carved in relief on a block, c. 6"-7" wide. The block is square at the base and curved in at the top slightly with a 'lip'. . Body: main torso is tall and slender. Head: very round and has some damage to its right side at top. Eyes: shown as 2 small round indentations, quite close together in relation to size of head. Nose: represented again by 2 small round indentations. Mouth: incised smile. Ears: not clearly evident although they could be very flat against the sides of the head. Chin: slight demarcation as a small notch. Neck: long and thin. Arms: long and thin. Her left arm is thinner and longer than her right, but is also reaching down further to the knee, with accompanying lower left shoulder and more sharply pointed elbow to her left arm. Breasts: Long, pendulous, hanging to sides of torso as though coming from underarms. Hands: her right clearly shows the thumb resting on inner thigh, with 4 fingers going behind thigh to rest or grasp right labia. Her left hand is less clear but still shows thumb, and 4 fingers which go towards the vulva but it is indeterminate whether they go behind or over the thigh. Vulva: Very pronounced and hugely disproportionate to rest of body. Altered perspective for vulva as it appears flat and therefore gives the appearance of hanging down from groin to ankles. Symmetrical lozenge-shape. Legs: both facing outwards, slightly bent at knees, feet to sides.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Above N doorway, inside the porch, is a badly weathered figural sculpture.	
	Architectural history		


	Other features	<p>Sheela is protected from the weather by a small leaded roof. E end of church is lower than the rest of the building, with slated apex roof, and 2 single-light plain tall thin windows, one on N side, one on S. E end wall: has c. C15th window, triple light with rose above, Gothic style. 2 heads, one either side of this window: male (king) on left and female (queen) on right. S wall: has 2 large triple-light windows with square-headed lintels. The E one has foliate decoration in squares of stone at each lintel stop (base). There are 2 sculpted memorial stones inserted into the S wall, C18th or C19th. Between these 2 square windows is a smaller double-light window with small quatrefoil above. S porch: has single, plain, tall, arched window to left of it. Exterior, E end of aisle: window with 4 lights and carving above in quite geometric style. Gothic-arch lintel with 2 pieces of foliate decoration in stone squares at each end of lintel (stops). Looks quite a late window: C17th or C18th?</p>
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Murray & Passmore</u> [1923: 140-1]: Describe the sheela as having been “built into the outside of the north wall of the church, east of the porch, about 9 feet from the ground. It is carved in the same stone of which the church is built, but there is nothing to show whether it is in original position; not whether it is contemporary with, or earlier than, the church. The date of the earliest work in the church is second quarter of C13th.” They go on to say: “The attenuated body has the ribs clearly marked. A noticeable point is the size and importance of the left hand, this is also a suggestion that the figure is pre-Christian ... The weathering of the stone has practically destroyed the features, which appear to have been rudely indicated. A short account of the figure was published, though without illustrations, in the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine, Vol. XXXIV (1906), p.156.”</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 245]: “Outside on the north wall, east of the porch, a standing figure with pendulous breasts and enormous genitalia with a well-marked clitoris ... Ribs are indicated.” Refer to Murray & Passmore’s comment that the earliest work in the church is second quarter C13th, but also say that “Dobson quotes Baldwin-Browne as thinking the sheela may be Saxon (... Dobson 1931 fig. 1).” They also cite references for Murray & Passmore’s article and the WANHM ref.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: reiterates Murray & Passmore’s [1923] dating for second quarter C13th for earliest parts of church, mentions Pevsner’s brief reference to the figure [1963: 324], and Hutchinson & Hutchinson’s description. His own comments are: “It is carved in</p>

		<p>a low niche on a slab, set about 3m from the ground ... Pillow-like pudenda, with a diamond-shaped opening, fill out the entire space between the legs. Rod-shaped neck and body, and arms akimbo with enormous hands resting on the thighs. H. c.36cm." No mention of ribs. Additional reference: Dobson [1931].</p> <p>Andersen is obviously not sure what to make of this sheela, apart from the vulva, for he says, "it is uncertain what can be said about the sheela from Oaksey church ... very interesting in itself for the extraordinary size of genitals" [1977: 102].</p> <p>Photograph [p.121, credited to NMR London].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: In gazetteer [p.162]; on distribution map [p.128], classified as a figure "with both hands only indicating the pudenda"; in List A England and Wales [p.116].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: Short entry mostly quoting Andersen quoting Hutchinson & Hutchinson, with very poor drawing.</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 162-3]: Use previous authors' remarks to make assumptions: " ... the Sheela-na-Gig can be found on the outside of the thirteenth-century church. It is set about three metres from the ground into the north wall, close by a large window ... She is carved in the same stone as the church itself and is probably contemporary with the church. (36cm high)."</p>
	Other information / comments	

19	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Michael at-the-North-Gate, Oxford Oxfordshire In the centre of town 13 October 2002 Ex-situ (originally on the church tower) Now in the treasury in the tower, as a museum exhibit. Originally set in the W wall of the tower, high up by a belfry window overlooking the N gate. Removed in 1928. Originally, at "the level of the third floor" [Martin 1929: 134]. Possibly originally primary (now ex-situ) Coarse stone, perhaps a grit-stone? Not the same as that used for the tower. [See notes from Andersen below.]	
	Description of sheela	<p>The figure is carved in relief on a block measuring c. 9" wide x 12" tall. It is a rough stone. Head: quite round with a pointed chin, and sits on top of shoulders (no neck). The head is turned slightly to her right. It is slightly disproportionately large to rest of body, being about one quarter of the total body length measured to the end of the legs. Facial features are weathered but possible to make out. Eyes: indentations, close together; nose: triangular-shaped, wider at bottom, with small indentations visible for nostrils. Mouth: small, possibly open, with indication of a smile. No ears. Shoulders: rounded. Arms: her left arm is bulkier than her right. Her left arm appears to go behind her left upper thigh. No indication of a hand. There is a smooth arched bend to this left arm. Her right arm is bent sharply at the elbow, and the lower arm comes in almost at a right angle with the right hand appearing to rest on the very top of her right thigh, although this is badly weathered. Torso: parallel-sided. Breasts: none indicated. Legs: wide apart but with her left leg higher up than her right. Slight indication of a knee on her left leg, which is slightly bent at the knee. Her right leg is sliced laterally across the top and is therefore quite damaged. Neither leg has a foot. Vulva: clearly demarcated as a deeply incised vertical groove c. 1.5" long. The area below the vulva and between the legs has been very deeply carved out, and to the right of the figure, but not nearly so deeply to the left.</p> <p>The figure is too badly weathered to see if the hand(s) went into the vulva. There is no</p>	

		indication that her left arm/hand went under the thigh to come through to the vulval area. Her right hand is most likely resting on her right hip or crease with the thigh at the hip.
	Other sculpture/decoration	
	Architectural history	<p>Tower built c. AD1040.</p> <p><u>RCHME</u> [1939: 140-3]: Walls are of rubble with local freestone dressings. W tower probably built in the first half of C11th. Chancel rebuilt and probably extended in C13th, and in c.1280 the S chapel of St Mary was added. The West tower: 4 storeys. Walls are of rubble with rubble angles on S side and of long and short quoins on the N side. In the N wall is a round-headed double-splay window, in the W wall is an original doorway, now blocked. Second storey has in the N wall a window similar to that below; in the W wall is a window similar to that in the N wall but taller. Third storey has in each wall an original window of two round-headed lights with imposts and a mid-wall baluster shaft supporting a cantilever impost; below the N window is an original doorway with imposts and a round head. "In the vestry – carved C17th head and an erotic female figure" [p.143].</p>
	Other features	The W wall of the tower faces into the street. The North gate was close by and would have been at the sheela's right. This does not appear to be a defensive tower; the whole tower was built during one period and has a ground-level window.
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Martin</u> [1929: 134]: With Plate showing the sheela in situ on the tower. It is to the left of the double-arched W window of the tower. The article identifies the sheela but does not describe it other than saying it is "the rudely carved figure of a woman of the kind known in Ireland as Sheela-na-gig". Martin was vicar of St Michael's from 1927-1961.</p> <p>b) <u>Murray</u> [1934 : 97]: Mentions the Oxford sheela in passing comment on the Kilpeck example, in stating that the "the arms, unduly long, are passed under the legs, giving the akimbo effect seen in the Oxford figure"; Murray refers to Martin's short article in <i>Man</i>.</p> <p>c) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: Only briefly mentions the Oxford sheela as being similar in general attitude to the [supposed] sheela at Penmon.</p> <p>d) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 244]: Say of the figure, "formerly on the west wall of the tower at the third floor, by a Saxon window; now removed to the vestry to prevent further weathering. A rather dynamic figure of Type 1a; the arms probably are in front of the thighs."</p> <p>e) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 142]: With photo, "A figure from the tower (11th century ...), formerly set</p>


		<p>in the wall on the W side, by a belfry window, at third floor level. Removed 1928 to the vestry ... The posture is standing, with legs carved straight and stretched away from the body. Gesture of both hands towards the abdomen. Genitals indicated by a slit. Head set low between the shoulders." On p. 101, Andersen states that the stone the sheela is made from is shelly limestone from a belt near Burford, and that of the tower is coral rag from Headington, Oxford.</p> <p>f) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: In their List A England and Wales [p.116], gazetteer [p.163], and on their distribution map [p.128] classed as a 3b figure (both hands only indicating the pudenda). No photo.</p> <p>g) <u>Green, Vivian H.</u> <i>The tower and church of St Michael at the North Gate</i>, [n.d., but after 1986: 22-3]: "The church possesses an unusual stone carving, a Sheela-na-gig, which is shown in one of the cabinets [in the Church Treasury]. It probably dates from the late 11th or early 12th century and was originally set in the west wall of the Tower high up by a belfry window overlooking the North Gate." Excellent photo [p.27].</p> <p>h) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 19]: No description, with misleading drawing that makes the vulva look like a large round hole, and the mouth to be open and gaping, neither of which is correct.</p> <p>i) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 163]: Still little description of the figure, "one hand reaches from behind the thighs and the other from in front, gesturing towards the genitals", with a different but still misleading drawing (gaping mouth). Neither author has probably visited this sheela.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>The note in the Treasury says the figure probably dates from the late C11th or early C12th. It is hard to tell from Martin's [1929] photo, showing the sheela next to the window on the tower, whether the window is Saxon or a later Norman insertion. If it is the latter then the sheela might have been placed there at the same time. Even if it is Saxon it is very late at c. AD1040, almost transitional with Norman styling. Could the sheela have been in original situ next to the window, making it an C11th figure, which would be very early for a dateable context for a sheela. Or, if it is a secondary insertion, could it have possibly come originally from the nearby Oxford castle which was built during the 1070s?</p>

20 & 21	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Seiriol's Church Penmon / Anglesey 24 July 2001 Priory church (a) Interior, W wall of S transept (b) Interior, to left above arch from W end of church into tower, on a small block of stone N/A (a) At least tertiary (removed from previous secondary situ by W.J. Hemp [1938: 136] from the outer face of the W wall of S transept) (b) Probably secondary Sandstone	 <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> A B </div>
	Description of sheela	(a) Badly weathered, large figure, c. 2' tall x 18" wide. Carved almost in the round. Head: fairly in proportion to rest of body. Head broader at top with eyes set low in face, giving appearance of very low forehead. Whole face very damaged / weathered. Nose and mouth: remains of still visible. Ears: her right is still visible. Neck: none. Head sits straight onto shoulders. Shoulders: very square. Arms: go straight down sides of torso. Hands: Her left hand may be resting on left thigh; right hand seems to go lower. Her right hand has 2 fingers remaining and the hand is clearly going down in a line from a very straight right arm. Torso: quite masculine and 'V' shaped, with nipped-in waist. Legs: go straight out from hips in an inverted 'V' shape. No evidence of feet but lower end of legs is badly damaged. Vulva: not evident. Breasts: not evident. (b) Possible highly stylised sheela. Head encircled by arms, and legs wide apart, almost straight out to sides, and distinct vulva-like hole between the legs. If not a sheela, certainly apotropaic. Stylistically similar to capital figure below to right.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Figure (a) has to its left a bearded, Romanesque head. Figure (b) is above a 4-columned arch which has unusual Romanesque capital sculpture: one to the left of a stylised large mouth, and 2 other capitals with stylised human figures. Figure (b) has another small block of stone immediately to its left of another head surrounded by its 'arms'. Both apotropaic figures?	

		S. doorway: at W end section of church, exterior, is Romanesque and has a sculpted tympanum. The original main doorway. The sculpture is of a dragon-horse-like hybrid beast, with its tail coming between the rear legs and then up across the body possibly to its mouth, with its head turned back upon itself. Plait-work decoration round edge of tympanum.
	Architectural history	
	Other features	To the N., c. 500yds. away from the Priory church, is St Seiriol's well (a natural spring) and early Christian site. The foundations of the cell are still visible by the well. From information board: The refectory, cellar and dormitory buildings near the church are all C13th, and originally formed the south range of the Priory cloister. These buildings were probably built at the same time the old Celtic monastery was re-organised as an Augustinian Priory. Refectory was on the first floor, with cellar below and dorm above. The kitchen and warming house at E end were added in C16th.
	Topography	The site is on a hill overlooking the Menai Straits.
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Piggott</u> [1930: 122-3]: "A rough stone carving built into the west wall of the south transept ... It represents a figure, the sex of which is not indicated, but which I suspect to be male, with legs wide apart and arms at the side. The stone is broken and the edges are obscured by plaster and mortar, but the legs seem to have been originally longer. There is no indication of features and the execution of the whole figure is rough ... The stone measures about 12" x 18". It belongs to a class of carvings associated with or built into the walls of churches, but which have no apparent Christian significance." Piggott also refers to the Oxford sheela as being a "somewhat similar figure".</p> <p>b) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137, with fig.]: "The figure was removed ... [by Hemp] ... from the outer face of the west wall of the south transept, where it had been inserted at some comparatively modern date --as indicated by the nature of the mortar which fixed and partly obscured it ... the legs wide apart, the left hand resting on the thigh, the right stretched down. The head is carved in the round, the rest of the body in high relief. The figure is so badly weathered that the face is obliterated, and there is no present indication of the breasts; the vulva is marked, but without the usual exaggeration. The general attitude may be compared with that of a Sheela from St Michael's, Oxford ...".</p> <p>c) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 244]: quote Hemp, and say the sheela is "much weathered and shows little detail. It is of Guest's Type Ia and its close resemblance to the sheela at St Michael's, Oxford leaves no doubt of its nature. It is however just possible,</p>


	<p>from Hemp's photograph, that the arms passed behind the thighs."</p> <p>d) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 143]: With photograph. "A figure formerly on the outside W wall of the S transept (probably C12th) ... Carved in high relief, with a thick head (features now worn away) and straight legs stretched out, the Penmon figure closely resembles the sheela at St Michael's Oxford, a fact which reflects on the date of the Oxford figure, sometimes assumed to be ancient." References: Piggott 1930; RCAHMWM 1937: 103, 121, & Pl 22(1); Hutchinsons 1969.</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p. 161], on distribution map [p.128] as type 4, in List A England and Wales [p.116]. Weir & Jerman have not questioned whether this figure is a sheela or even an exhibitionist, as they identify it as a type 4, which is a figure "with one hand either touching or indicating the pudenda" [p.126]. There is actually no pudenda evident at all.</p> <p>f) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 15]: Makes much of this sheela one of the two examples in Wales being on Anglesey, and thereby interprets it as a direct link with Ireland. Refers to Andersen saying this figure is similar to the Oxford one. Appalling drawing.</p> <p>g) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 168]: With drawing that indicates, incorrectly, legs bent at the knees. They say the figure was originally located in the W wall of the south transept of the old church (which is not correct as that is where it currently is after having been removed there from somewhere else). They also think it is similar in pose to the sheela at Iona. It is unlikely that this comparison could be made as the Iona sheela is extremely weathered, like the one at Abbeylara, but even from their own drawings of the two figures the difference in pose is marked. They also say there is another figure in the "dark interior of the church" which may also be a sheela-na-gig, "but very little is known of it". Unfortunately, they do not cite from where they have got this information. It could be that they are confusing the two figures as the figure I have called 'A' is in a very dark part of the church. They cannot have visited the site or else they would have been able to identify where the other possible sheela is located.</p>
Other information / comments	<p>Figure (A) is the one referred to by other authors as the sheela at Penmon. I question whether it is a sheela, and wonder whether it is actually a male figure, despite it being compared with the Oxford sheela by previous authors (although the Oxford example definitely has a vulva). There is nothing to suggest it is female, and more to suggest it is male. It is interesting that Piggott also thought this, although Andersen does not draw attention to this and apparently</p>

	accepts it as a sheela, and the Hutchinsons similarly appear to accept it as such. Figure A carved almost in the round.
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22	Site Townland / County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Romsey Abbey Hampshire In town centre 20 September 2000 Abbey church Exterior, on W. wall of the N. apse. c. 30' Probably primary: stones around her have been inserted to allow her to fit. Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	In bas-relief, c. 15" high x c. 12" wide. Completely fills the stone block she's carved from. Head: round, bald top with furrowed brow. Chin: pointed. Eyes, nose & mouth: clearly defined, even from ground view. No neck. Her right arm is bent in at a sharp angle at the elbow. Fingers clearly shown on right hand. Holding a staff in her right hand which goes across her body from her left shoulder to her right foot. 2 striation marks on her left cheek. Mouth open. Her left hand is holding something with a handle, which appears to go either across or behind her left thigh. Her left arm is held out from the body & is at a less sharp angle than the right. Fingers are visible on her left hand, although not as clearly as on her right. Breasts: indicated, particularly on her left side. Legs: apart, knees outward & bent. Feet: wedge-shaped with inner foot facing outwards, toes pointing out at right angles from each side. Partial-squatting position. Vulva: clearly shown – incised groove. There is something beneath the vulva – cannot make out what it is (need binoculars!). Lower body (i.e. from waist down) disproportionate to upper body. Upper body = 75% of the image.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	At least 3 sets of earlier (Romanesque) windows below her, which are now filled in, close to where the apse meets the nave. Present window she is above is Gothic, 3 lights, not ogee. Above her is a Romanesque arch window with chevron pattern. Although there is a corbel table near her (to her left) on N. wall of the nave, she does not appear to be in any way associated with it. The corbels are larger than she is, & the table at a different level from her, being c. 1' higher.	

	Architectural history	Abbey originally built AD 907, destroyed by Danes. Present building is Norman, built between 1120-1180. Church of St Mary & St Ethelfleda. According to Andersen [pp.128-9], the west wall of the north apse retains scarring of the parish chantry which was added in 1403 to accommodate the growing number of parishioners, following the dissolution of the nuns' establishment. This scarring shows the roof-line and remnants of triple arcading fitting in with the Norman arcading on the tower but embellished with C15th detail.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Murray</u> [1934:98]: "The building was a nunnery ... Throughout the Middle Ages young girls of good position were brought up in nunneries, and at puberty left the convent to be married ... The Sheila-na- gig on the walls of the abbey suggests that the bride may have been prepared for marriage within the convent. The staff is an unusual feature in such figures [i.e. sheela-na-gigs] ... I suggest that its use was for breaking the hymen as is done in modern Egypt by the bridegroom's fingers." Murray is, however, being completely speculative here as she also says that "our knowledge of the intimate customs of the women of that period is derived only from the vague hearsay evidence of male writers, who were invariably ecclesiastics."</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 246]: "On the outside of the W. wall of the N. transept of the church above a Romanesque window. A very remarkable boldly carved figure with splayed thighs, the left arm apparently resting on the left knee, the right grasping a long carved crook. [They also refer to Murray's 1934 article, fig. 30, but not to her text about the figure.] There is an object below the figure which may represent some sort of seat."</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 143] "A figure set in a square relief on the outside of the W. wall of the N. transept, above a Romanesque window. The woman is boldly carved, with splayed thighs. The left arm points downwards beside the left knee, the right arm grasps a long crook or staff, maybe that of an abbess. On the ground between the legs there is an unexplained shape. A reference to the legend of St Caecilia has been suggested by a folklorist, freely interpreting the enigmatic object on the ground as the mutilated breasts of the saint [Godwin, J.P. / 'Sheila-na-gigs and Christian saints', <u>Folklore</u>, 80, 1969, p.222].</p>

		d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Not in e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: copies almost word-for-word what Andersen says above. f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 164]: do not add anything new.
	Other information / comments	

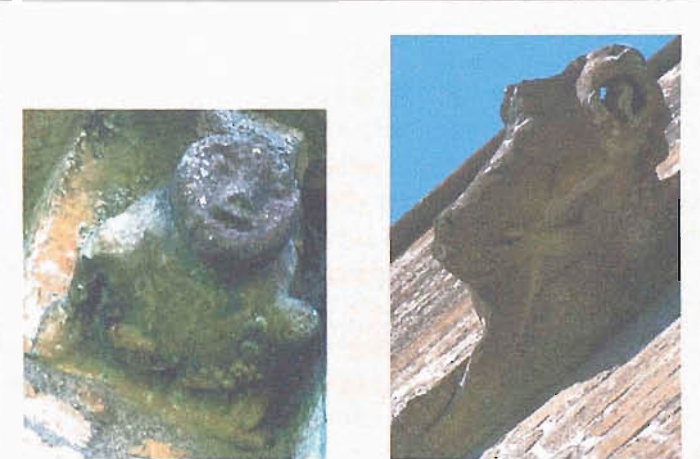
23	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Andrew, South Tawton / Devon Small village 14 September 2002 Parish church Interior, roof boss (not on central line), S side of the nave at the W end, and the 5 th boss in from the W end c.20' Primary N/A as wooden	
	Description of sheela	Difficult to view this sheela due to the angle and height. Head: small in relation to the rest of her body, and round. Ears: both visible, well-defined and naturalistic. Eyes: clearly defined and may be shut. Nose: small. Mouth: visible, with large, broad and fat lips, which are apart, neither smiling nor glum. Hair: none. There is foliage behind her head to either side, and coming down the sides of the figure. Neck: none. Head sits straight on top of torso. Shoulders: rounded and quite robust. Torso: extremely long. Breasts: none. Arms: very long, both coming down the sides of the body. Her left arm is bent more at the elbow than her right. Hands: her left hand rests on her inner left thigh, on the crease with the hip; her right hand rests in a similar position on her right inner thigh. Both hands have clearly defined long fingers, with fangernails (unusually) shown. 4 fingers on each hand but no thumbs indicated. Legs: her left leg is held higher than her right so her left hand is higher than her right. The legs are wide apart in a squatting-type position. The thighs are thick-set, especially her left one, with part of the buttocks being visible as part of the upper thigh. Knees shown bent. Lower legs are almost non-existent. Feet: come straight out just below the knees! Both feet facing sideways, inner foot outwards. Toes not shown. Vulva: visible but not particularly well-defined. It is shown as a large indentation. The fingers do not go into it. There is a nail to hold the boss to the roof just below the vulva, which gives the mistaken impression that something is coming out of the vulva.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	The sheela has a 5-petalled flower roof boss to her right, a foliate leaf to her left, and a Green Man with foliage spewing from his mouth in front of her. Roof bosses are the main sculptural interest in this church. There are 11 foliate head bosses of which there are 8 Green Men. All of these are on the central boss line, with 4 in the	

		chancel, 4 in the nave, and 2 in the S side chapel.
	Architectural history	Perpendicular style church built of granite. The arches of the nave are of Beer stone. Wagon roof with carved wooden roof bosses, of late C15th or early C16th date. Originally the wagon roof would have had painted plaster between the ribs which would have shown the bosses up much more clearly than they now appear.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Murray</u> [1936: 184]: Murray acknowledges Cave's photographing of this figure. She says the roof dates to the C15th, and that the figure appears to be in original position and of the same date as the roof.</p> <p>b) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 138]: Briefly mentions this figure as either "an example of medieval Humour" as he says she is "without the typical Sheela exaggeration", or that she possibly represents one of the vices.</p> <p>c) <u>Cave</u> [1948: 212]: "a very typical sheila."</p> <p>d) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 246]: Refer to Hemp and Murray, accepting the figure as a sheela however, and stating that it might be the latest datable sheela in Great Britain.</p> <p>e) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 143]: Andersen repeats what Cave, Hemp, Murray, and the Hutchinsons say. There is no photograph. I do not think he visited this site.</p> <p>a) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Not in.</p> <p>b) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: Refers to the place as 'South Taunton', and repeats some of what Andersen says. No drawing.</p> <p>c) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 165]: with drawing. They say that this is the only known example of a sheela carved in wood. They also say the church is at Okehampton, although it is listed by them (still) as at 'South Taunton'. They add nothing new apart from stating that her "background of floral designs ... may indicate fertility."</p>
	Other information / comments	

24	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Giles, Stanton St Quintin Wiltshire Small village 13 October 2001 Church Exterior, N side of tower, at E end near quoin stone. c. 35' Primary ?	
	Description of sheela	<p>Carved in relief on a stone block that measures c. 12" high x 9"-10" wide. Head: out of proportion to rest of body being c. one third of total size. It is wider at the top, almost wedge-shaped, but the top appears to have been sliced off. Ears: large, round, with hollowed-out interiors, and quite high up the sides of the head. Eyes: round indentations, placed higher up the face than in naturalistic position. Nose: indicated, 'sausage'-shaped. Mouth: quite large (in relation to rest of facial features), horizontal, open. Neck: short, sitting atop shoulders. Arms: bent outwards at elbows in arched shape, with hands resting on hips, either side of vulva. Vulva: large, round hole, sculpted out into a hollow. Below this there is a second similar hole, probably an anus. Torso: parallel-sided, with belly button indicated by another (smaller than anus) hollowed-out hole, and to its right and slightly below there is another smaller still hole, and possibly yet another below this again. Breasts: visible, and are most unusual. Represented as almost cupmarks, very high up the torso, in line with the shoulders. Between them, and dropping down directly to the belly button there is a lightly sculpted vertical line, possibly the sternum. Hands: The area around the hands on the hips is badly weathered, but it is possible that the hands are holding open the vulva. On her left hand two fingers are visible going to the opening of the vulva, and this looks mirrored on her right hand, although this hand is particularly weathered. Legs: are disproportionately very short to the rest of the body. They appear to be straight, standing with legs slightly apart, feet turned outwards. Feet: indicated as triangles, not defined. Her left foot is better preserved; the right foot is very</p>	


		<p>weathered.</p> <p>Associated objects: from each wrist, at c. 45 degree angle, there is a strange linear object. Each has a groove in the centre and ends with a rounded end – almost like a bone, or perhaps ribbon.</p>
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>Other sculpture inside the church is probably from the C19th restoration.</p> <p>The S doorway looks partially Romanesque, but may be re-used stonework – Pevsner is not sure of its date.</p>
	Architectural history	<p>The tower is Norman, apart from the C19th window in Romanesque style, which has been added in the top section. Although the sheela is in this top section, she appears to be in original situ, as the stonework is undisturbed and is the same as the stonework on the lower portion of the tower.</p> <p>The N wall of the nave is also Norman. There is no S side as there is a S aisle instead, which was added in the C13th [Pevsner].</p> <p>A new chancel was built in 1888 (stated on plaque).</p> <p>There are no original windows apart from the two in the N side of the tower below the sheela (again suggesting that the sheela is in original situ).</p> <p>Pevsner (Cherry) [1975: 478-8]: “Norman central tower ... Big leaf-capitals with volutes. Arch with zig-zag. The date may be c.1125. The upper parts of the tower are ... neo-Norman ... 1851. S arcade of the early C13 ... The doorway is highly puzzling. It has keeled shafts with wholly Norman capitals, e.g. beasts’ heads biting into the shafts, but an arch and a hood-mould like the S arcade. Is it made up of parts of two dates? And where does the small round window in the N chapel W wall come from, with its pellet band?” No mention of the sheela.</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Pevsner</u> [1975: 78-9]: Not in.</p> <p>b) <u>Jordan</u> [2000: 48-49]: This is the only written reference to this sheela. Jordan says this sheela is little-known, but says the head, bent arms, indented vulva and splayed legs can all be made out from the ground. She sees this sheela (and the one at Oaksey) as ‘apotropaic totems’, “to turn away evil by the exposure of her private parts”. As well as a protective function, Jordan sees sheelas as remnants of the Celtic hag-goddess, the crone, “a hideous, aged, powerful and sexual goddess-figure”, although she thinks the</p>

		masons no longer were aware of this ancestry.
	Other information / comments	This sheela has not been recorded in any publication.

25 & 26	Site County General location Date visited Building type	Church of St Mary the Virgin, East Stoke (Stoke-sub-Hamdon) Somerset Small village, referred to by Ashdown [1993] in his title as being Stoke-sub-Hamdon, although he states in the text of his article that the sheelas are at East Stoke. 6 April 2002 Parish church	 <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> 1 2 </div>
		Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	2 sheelas, both external. Fig. 1 is on the corbel table, N wall of the chancel, third corbel in from the E end. Fig. 2 is on the S wall of the nave, and is a sheela-type figure carved as a gargoyle. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are both c. 12-15', being associated with the string course Both primary, but different dates. Fig. 1 is likely to be C12th, Fig. 2 is c. C15th. Hamstone
		Description of sheela	<p>Fig. 1: Squatting figure (similar to sheela at Worth Matravers). Head: large, oval. No hair. Eyes: well-defined. Nose: long and straight. Mouth: open. Some erosion under the figure. Arms: appear to go behind legs, and possibly curl around under buttocks, with hands going into vulva.</p> <p>Fig. 2: A large figure, the only remaining gargoyle in this wall. This figure is quite unique, abutting the wall facing downwards to the ground. Her left side, which abuts the wall, is well preserved but her right is damaged, missing her right arm and leg. Head: disproportionately</p>



		large, but apart from this, the rest of the figure is in proportion. Hair: long and wavy. Mouth: large, round opening for rainwater. Breasts: very clearly visible, and naturalistic. Her left breast is pendulous but her right is not. Arms: her left arm is bent out at the elbow and comes back in with the left hand clearly touching above the open vulva. Belly: distended. Left leg: wide apart from groin area, bent slightly at the knee outwards. If the missing right leg also did this, it would definitely suggest a birthing position. Vulva: when looking at this figure from beneath and front-facing, the vulva is clearly very asymmetrically placed being too far to the figure's left. The vulva is open, carved quite deeply, but there is no hole for water to come through as Ashdown suggests. The shape of the open vulva indicates the first stages of preparing to give birth.
	Other sculpture/decoration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Chancel, N wall: chequer-board pattern design running along above the corbel table. 2) Other corbels: next to the sheela is a human head, in a similar style to the sheela, with 2 hands below it holding cone-shaped objects (drinking horns according to Ashdown) either side of cheeks. Further corbels on this side are either damaged badly or missing or of little interest, e.g. scroll, wheatsheaf, damaged four-legged animal (possibly a lamb). 3) Chancel, N wall: Norman window, (single light, round-headed, thin) with image of a figure attacking a serpent-like dragon carved on it, thought to be a St Michael and the devil image [Ashdown 1993: 70]. 4) Chancel, S wall: corbel table of little interest, apart from one corbel which is like a spoked 'wheel' type design, reminiscent of the triquetra at Ballinderry castle, Co. Galway. 5) There is a Norman window with a chevron design above it in this S chancel wall. 6) Nave, S wall: Norman window (single light, round-headed, thin) with wheatsheaf-style design above. 7) Nave, S wall: Romanesque, blocked-up, trabeate doorway, with palm tree column on left and rope-work design on right, with fluted capitals and petal motifs. Wheatsheaf design above the capitals also. 8) Tower has 4 gargoyles. 9) S transept has 2 gargoyles. 10) Nave, N door, in porch: tympanum above, showing a Tree of Life with three birds, centaur to the left aiming arrow at lion-like creature to the right of the tree.
	Architectural history	Chancel: 3 later windows below the N corbel table, c. C14th-C15th.

		2 post-Norman windows below S corbel table. Nave, S wall: later crenellations above the gargoyle sheela. Romanesque nave and chancel
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>d) <u>Andersen</u> [1977]: Not in</p> <p>e) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Not in</p> <p>f) <u>Ashdown</u> [1993]: It would seem that this is the first article focusing on these two sheelas, although Ashdown refers to Bettey and Taylor [1982] who look at several of the other Stoke carvings. Ashdown describes the corbel sheela as having attributes which are “typical of the classic sheila figure ... It falls within the usual 12th century age-range of the type” [p.71]. He sees a fertility theme generally within the sculpture at this church with its corn ears, sheelas, and, he says, a leaping hare corbel, in profile, on S wall of the chancel. Of the gargoyle sheela, he says “she is set in the 15th century parapet, although she might be 14th century work moved when the height of the nave wall was raised in the 15th century” [p.72]. He thinks that the showing of breasts is unusual for a sheila, that she has a “lolling tongue”, and that water would have originally flowed from her mouth and from between her legs. This latter comment is based on thinking there is a hole between her legs, but in actual fact it is some lichen which gives the possible illusion that there is a hole. I could also see no “lolling tongue”, but possibly a stone blocking the hole. He views this later figure as “deliberately pornographic”. In his references (no. 10), he firstly says he thinks the gargoyle sheela is a similar design to the South Tawton roof boss sheela, which is blatantly not so; secondly, he says there is “a comic Sheila-type grotesque of similar date [i.e. C15th] may be seen below the east parapet of the tower of St Michael’s church, Brent Knoll” [p.74]. I later visited this site and recorded this figure [see entry in this corpus].</p> <p>g) <u>Roberts</u> [1995]: Not in.</p> <p>h) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001]: Not in.</p>
	Other information / comments	Gargoyle figure connection with mermaid?

27	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Nicholas, Studland Dorset Small rural village 28 May 2000 Parish church Exterior N wall of nave, corbel-table c. 15' Primary	
	Description of sheela	An almost abstract figure, comprising of a very large round head from which the legs emerge. Squatting position, with very large vulva, like a sphere with an opening. There is something protruding from within it. The left hand of the figure, with clearly defined fingers, touches the outer left labia, with the left arm going behind the left leg. Her right arm is not represented; instead there is a strange wing-like projection, which is partly damaged. Knees are bent. Feet are shown. The whole image is a schematised representation of something female, not necessarily human, and much less so than most other sheela images.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Exterior corbels on nave: 25 on S wall; 23 on N wall. An assortment of grotesques, human heads, animal heads, acrobats, exhibitionists, mouth-pullers – in short, a fantastic range of the Romanesque repertoire of motifs. [See Lundgren & Thurlby 1999, pp. 4 & 6 for a fuller description of the motifs represented.]	
	Architectural history	RCHME [1970: 276-9]: “ ... Walls are of local rubble partly re-faced in ashlar. Church was probably built shortly before the Conquest: chancel, central tower, and nave. The nave was rebuilt late C11th, partly on the foundations of the earlier nave which were uncovered during the restoration of 1880-1. In the mid-C12th the standing chancel and tower were partly refaced and remodelled, new arches, windows and vaulting being inserted, and the nave walls were given new chamfered plinths, base courses and corbel-tables ... The nave is of the late	

		<p>C11th. The N wall has an added mid-C12th corbel-table of 23 corbels, carved with beasts' heads, human heads, grotesques and a saltire." No mention of the sheela image. Interestingly, Lundgren & Thurlby [1999: 6-8] do not agree with the pre-Conquest date for the building of the church ascribed by the RCHME report, thinking it more likely to be C12th, with an approximate date suggested of somewhere between 1125-1140 [1999: 13]. "The basic fabric of the church is without doubt entirely Romanesque" [<i>ibid.</i>].</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Pevsner & Newman</u> [1972: 465]: Corbel-table referred to but no mention of a sheela.</p> <p>b) <u>Andersen</u> [1977]: Not in.</p> <p>c) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: Just one line: "On a corbel of the old church is a female pulling her vulva with one hand." No drawing.</p> <p>d) <u>Lundgren & Thurlby</u> [1999: 6]: Describing the corbels to be found on the N wall, E to W, of the nave, the sheela image they describe thus: "[corbel] 14. A crouching female figure with huge head held at an angle and pulling open her vulva with her left hand." However, their interpretation is based on Weir & Jerman's 'images of lust' idea, seeing this image along with the other exhibitionist figures at Studland as warning of the "dangers of sexual promiscuity ... intended to allay passions by distorting the figures into grotesques" [1999: 12]. Although they do not specifically name this image as a sheela, they clearly think it is, for they say "she is closely comparable with the famous female exhibitionist on a corbel ... of Kilpeck church" [<i>ibid.</i>].</p> <p>e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 165-6]: "A unique female figure ... The vulva is very rounded and over-enlarged and she is holding it with an over-sized left hand ... only the left arm is depicted whilst on the right there is a well defined but quite incomprehensible fan-like shape towards which her head is inclined. Within the enormous opening of her vulva a rounded clitoris is well defined and her right leg is rounded with a pointed end where the toe should be, in contrast to the other more conventional leg. This figure appears to embody aspects of the toad or frog as well as the egg." With a fairly accurate drawing.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>I disagree with McMahon & Roberts' notion that the image depicts a clitoris within the vulva. Firstly, it is in quite the wrong place, and secondly it seems more likely that it is a reference to birthing.</p> <p>Another possible link between high status (building/patron) and a sheela image on the</p>


		building: “The inclusion of a corbel table with sculptures, as on the north and south walls of the nave at Studland, was popular in churches of the highest rank in Norman England” [Lundgren & Thurlby 1999: 12].
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28 & 29	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Catherine's Church Tugford / Shropshire 23 July 2001 Norman Church, possibly C11th 2 small images, one definitely a sheela, just inside the S door and above it, one at each side c. 7' Secondary Figures: soft (shale-like?) stone with inclusions	 A	 B
	Description of sheela	<p>Facing the door from within the church:</p> <p>A) <u>Sheela figure to right</u>: c. 6" tall x 5½" wide. Head: is main focus of image. Head is naturalistic, even if disproportionately large to rest of body. Head is 2½"-3" long x 2" wide, so is about half the size of the entire figure. Hair: almost like a cap across top of head and coming down onto top half of forehead. Eyebrow ridges shown. Eyes: clearly shown. Nose: fairly large (quite fleshy looking). Ears: none visible. Mouth: open, with tongue protruding; upper lip quite prominent. Cheeks: pronounced. Body: hunched, no neck, head right down in a completely unnaturalistic way (gives the impression she is trying to lick her vulva). Shoulders: represented, with quite thin arms coming down round outside of body. Arms: Her right arm goes behind and under her right leg with right hand clearly grasping into vulva; her left arm also goes across her left leg (cannot tell if it goes behind it or over it as it is so worn, but possibly behind). Her left hand also grasps the vulva. Vulva: groove incised quite deeply, c. 0.5cm - 0.75cm. Legs: there appears to be a left knee shown. Her left leg is held up higher than her right. Ends of legs probably originally had feet, though too worn to discern now. Inserted vertically into wall.</p> <p>B) <u>Figure to left</u>: Uncertain as to whether this is a sheela. It is very badly damaged in the genital area, and its right leg has very little left of it. It is c. 7" long x 4" wide at widest point. Smaller figure than first example, although longer. Head: 2" long x 1½-2" wide.</p>		

		<p>Smaller face than first example. Same hunched attitude of head with no neck, however. Arms: its right shoulder with arm visible, bent inwards at the elbow, and hand going to chin with the thumb above and to side of mouth. Its left shoulder and arm are missing, but looks like the arm originally went down the left side of the body, under the left leg, and hand to vulva. Vulva: not visible now at all – the area is just a lump of stone. Mouth: clearly visible and open. It is possible that fingers went into the mouth, pulling it down. Hair: similar to other example, and eyebrow ridges, nose and shape of face. Eyes: are depressions rather than clearly marked eyes. Belly: looks and feels rounded – possibly pregnant. Legs: its left leg is long and fairly thin, with a foot shown – no toes. Inserted almost horizontally into wall.</p> <p>Both examples are sculpted virtually ‘in the round’.</p>
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>Although an old church, most of everything has been stripped out of the interior. Very plain. S doorway in porch is Norman / Romanesque with a head at each label stop, both very denuded. Lozenge design on top arch.</p> <p>N wall exterior has blocked-up Romanesque or Saxon doorway (plain, rounded single arch). Two types of stone have been used for the church: a red sandstone and something greyer. N wall has one small Norman window, with possible second nearer E end. E end exterior has a ‘ledge’ c. 5’6” from ground, below which is a triple blind arcade [similar to Buncton]. The whole of the N wall exterior looks as though it has been covered with cement, most of it now not remaining.</p> <p>S wall exterior, E end, there is a single blind arcade with very small columns with leaf pattern, and a tiny blocked-up doorway with a sculpted tympanum in red sandstone, quite badly weathered. Imagery may be stylised foliage. There is also a carved head of a ? king at E end under gable-end eaves, with another corresponding head at other side (N wall, E end gable), although a very different type of head: grimacing face with down-turned mouth and eyes shut.</p>
	Architectural history	<p>May be C11th. Tower – later; has Gothic doorway.</p> <p>Nearby is Heath Chapel which was built in 1090, and has medieval wall paintings.</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Hemp</u> [1938: 137]: Only refers to one of the sheelas, “a ... small sheela some 6 ins. high, interesting because she is carved in high relief on late twelfth century stonework which supports the rear arch of the door and must, therefore, be contemporary with it. The</p>


		<p>attitude is as at Holgate.” It is not entirely clear from this which of the two figures Hemp is referring to, but presumably the one to the right of the door, the position of which is easier to make out.</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 244]: “ a small sheela, about 6” high, carved in high relief on a late C12th support of the rear arch of the south door and so inside the church. The arms are specifically said to pass behind the thighs, as in the Holdgate and Kilpeck examples; otherwise clearly Type 1a. No photograph has been published [Hemp 1938].” They do not state which figure they are referring to as the sheela, nor, indeed, that there is another figure there at all. They appear to be repeating Hemp’s description. No photograph, and have probably not visited the site in person.</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 144]: quotes Pevsner [<u>Shropshire</u>, 1958: 305]: “‘Norman first of all the S doorway with one order of shafts carrying a trumpet and an upright stiff-leaf capital’ ... ‘Two Sheila-na-Gigs, l and r of the S doorway inside’. Both figures are small, some 16cm high, carved in high relief (very nearly in the round) on a late 12th century support of the rear arch of the S door. The best preserved example has its very big head set low between the shoulders, and the hands and arms are passed behind the legs, which are pulled up. The manner of seating is partly due to, or suited to, the slant of the recess in which the figure is placed.” [Thus, unsure whether they are in original situ.] Describing the second figure: “Companion piece of the above, seated or half-reclining (set at a slant). One hand held towards the chin, the other towards the pudenda. Minute limbs and features. H. c. 16cm, same as above.” Cites the Hutchinson reference for late C12th date for support of the rear arch of the south door. Although unable to comment positively as to whether these sheelas are in original situ or not, in his text [p. 42] he does state that he thinks the Romanesque front of the doorway (with the heads) and the sheelas are contemporary and are “likely components of the same complex”, which suggests he thinks they are in original situ. Photographs [p.97]. References Pevsner; Hemp [1938: 137]; Hutchinson [1969: 244].</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.164]; on distribution map [p.128], describing one as a Sheela-na-gig with “both hands passed below the thighs from behind, fingers inserted in the vulva”, the other as a figure with “only one hand passed behind”; in List A, England and Wales [p.116].</p>
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		e) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 166]: Say “it is reminiscent of the famous Kilpeck sheela with the haunched [<i>sic</i>] shoulders and the hands passed below the slightly pulled-up legs. The other, on the opposite side of the door has her hand to her mouth in a comical pose almost as if she is pondering her friend across the other side of the entrance.” Re-state the Hutchinsons’ comment of late C12th date for the support of the rear arch.
	Other information / comments	

30	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary situ Geology	Church of St Mary and St Andrew, Whittlesford Cambridgeshire On edge of village 31 July 2001 Church The sheela is on the S wall of the tower above a round-arched window 30' – 35' Secondary Sandstone.	
	Description of sheela	<p>Carved in relief on a large stone (with another figure, see below). The stone the figures are carved on is not in original situ as it is different stone from the other stones surrounding the window. It has also broken at some point, at approximately the midriff of the male image. The stone looks as though it's been sliced off at the top right cutting off part of the male image's back. It is possible this stone has come from an earlier period of the church.</p> <p>Quite a 'chunky' sheela, in a squatting position, frontal view, and mostly in proportion. Head: not disproportionately large; it sits on the torso. Neck: none. Eyes: appear shut. Nose: well-defined. Mouth: small, not smiling. Arms: her right arm comes out from the shoulder and is sharply bent at the elbow, then comes in under her right leg with her right hand clearly visible and going into the vulva. 4 fingers are clearly visible on right hand. Her left arm is less easy to discern. Breasts: large, melon-like and not pendulous. They are angled out from the chest. Legs: wide apart and bent. Vulva: very distinct and deeply incised, as a long triangle, narrow at the top and much wider at the bottom.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	The sheela has a male image associated with her, which has an erect penis. He is in profile, to the sheela's left and facing her. He has a disproportionately short lower half of his body to his upper half, and very short legs. He also has a beard (or it could be a cap / helmet with chin-strap) and moustache. The penis is straight and there appear to be testicles represented too.	
	Architectural history	Saxon church originally. 1) Saxon window in W end of N wall.	


		<p>2) Oldest blocked-up doorway is at E end of S wall.</p> <p>3) At E end of N wall there is another blocked-up doorway and parts of windows.</p> <p>4) 8 gargoyles on tower</p> <p>5) Porch is C14th or C15th with 2 arching cross-beams (oak) going W to E each with carvings of double heads.</p>
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Murray</u> [1934: 98-99]: with photo. The only example Murray says she has seen where the male is represented with a sheela-na-gig. She describes the male figure but not the sheela, apart from saying that the sheela “is in the Baubo-Phryne or frog attitude, the breasts are represented, and, like most of the sheila figures, no hair is represented.”</p> <p>b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969: 243]: “On the south side of the tower, on an irregular block forming the arch of a Norman window, a squatting sheela of type 3, approached by a zoomorphic male figure.” They refer to Murray’s article, and say “this group is unique, but certain analogies to the male figure are considered below”. This amounts to a photograph of the male figure at Abson, Glos. They also say the church at Whittlesford is C11th [p.247].</p> <p>c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 144]: with photograph. Calls it the church of St Mary and St Michael. “On the S side of the Tower, on an irregular block forming the arch of a Norman window there is a squatting sheela, approached across the window by a male animal, or zoomorphic male figure, with a powerful erection. The female is in a frontal position, on her haunches, with clearly outlined fingers of her right hand clutching the open vulva. The group is unique, but certain analogies to the male figure can be found on churches such as Abson.” He thus repeats most of what the Hutchinsons say. He makes the point that this sheela “has been fitted in ... close by a Window” [p.100], which suggests he thinks the stone is not in original situ. References: Pevsner, <i>Cambridgeshire</i>, 1954; Fraser, D. ‘The heraldic woman’, in <i>The many faces of primitive art</i>, 1966: 45; Hutchinson article, but not the Murray article.</p> <p>d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Listed in gazetteer [p.164]; on distribution map [p.128] as type 2; in List ‘A’ England and Wales [p.116]; photograph [p.7].</p> <p>e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 19]: with poor drawing. “A sheela-na-gig that has been placed on an old church (11th-12th century) dedicated to the two most powerful and mysterious of the</p>

		<p>Christian 'saints', St Mary and St Michael. The carving is above a window on the south side of the tower and consists of a well-defined sheela-na-gig shown in classic squatting pose and an ithyphallic man/beast which straddles the window towards her. A unique British carving."</p> <p>f) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 167]: with improved drawing, but not accurate (i.e. they depict the erect penis as bent at the end which it is not). They combine what they have said above with some of what Andersen says, adding that "the male creature has been likened to the Saxon god Baal", although they do not cite who has said this.</p>
	Other information / comments	It is possible that the stone the sheela and male image are on was originally a tympanum.


31	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	<p>Church of St Nicholas, Worth Matravers Dorset Rural village church 24 January 2001 Church Exterior, corbel on N wall of chancel c. 12' Probably primary. The 10 most easterly corbels are probably in original situ; 8th one (going from E to W) looks like a sheela.</p> <p>(Photo: A. Woodcock)</p>	
	Description of sheela	<p>Squatting figure with Romanesque-style head and ears high up (bear-like). Head: disproportionately large to rest of body. Large chin. No hair visible. Eyes, nose, mouth clearly defined. Head sits on top of shoulders – no neck. Arms: both coming down in front of body towards vulva area. Her right arm is less well defined. Fingers visible on her left hand which is also the hand touching the top of vulva. Vulva: explicit, and looks like an internal view. Knees bent, facing forwards. Feet flat to ground facing forwards. No toes depicted.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<p>To the sheela's right is a lion, to her left a bird of prey, next to which is a fox.</p>	
	Architectural history	<p><u>RCHME</u> [1970: 410-11]: walls of local rubble with ashlar dressings. Church consists of a chancel, nave, and W tower, built c. 1100. In C13th the chancel was rebuilt, except for parts of the N wall, and additional lancets were inserted into the nave; at a subsequent date, the elaborate chancel arch and S doorway of c.1160 were brought from elsewhere, probably after the Dissolution, together with contemporary fragments and incorporated into the building. The E wall was rebuilt in the mid-C14th. The Church was restored between 1869-1872. "The chancel has reset corbel-tables of c.1100 on the N and S walls, on the N of ten corbels carved with grotesques, beasts' heads, a squatting man, a bird, a bird's head, and a rabbit, on the S human and animal heads and a running animal." No mention of the sheela (the 'squatting man'?).</p>	
	Other features		
	Topography		


	Referred to by other authors	Only referred to very recently in the published literature: a) <u>Woodcock</u> [2002: 110-11]: States the church is early Norman, c. AD1100. The sheela is on a corbel on the exterior north side of the chancel. The corbel table consists of 64 corbels, and is original to the site, although parts of it may have been rearranged as a result of various later rebuilding and restoration programmes [see RCHME 1970: 410-11]. However, Woodcock thinks it is more likely that the sheela is in original situ and location as the north wall (unlike the E and S walls) does not appear to have been rebuilt or interfered with in later centuries.
	Other information / comments	

PART C: FIGURES THAT ARE NOT SHEELAS


1.	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St James the Great, Abson / Gloucestershire 2 August 2001 Church Exterior, on the E wall of the tower, very near the top, and below a much-weathered canopied figure At least 45' Primary	
	Description of sheela	The so-called sheela figure is inserted horizontally, with its head to the left (S facing). It appears to have a cap on (there is a very clear line of the cap on its head). It also appears to be wearing a padded tunic, with puff shoulders, with lines going down to the chest. There may also be a belt, and both hands go slightly to the figure's right side, and may be holding the belt. Cannot see any indication that this is a sheela.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The much-weathered figure in the canopy above the 'sheela' is seated and robed. No crown is visible, however. 2) To the 'sheela's' right and below it is a gargoyle of a two-headed human holding a shield. 3) There is another canopy with its figure missing on the S wall of the tower, immediately below which is a green Man with pig's ears, his mouth spewing two pieces of foliage. 4) Similarly, on W wall of tower there is a canopy with its figure missing, with the head of a rabbit beneath it. 5) The same arrangement for the N wall of the tower, but cannot make out what the image is beneath – looks like foliage. 6) Chancel, E wall, exterior, there is a carved, red sandstone phallic man, quite similar to the Whittlesford example. 7) Nave, S wall, exterior, there are two pieces of Celtic-style decorated stonework. 8) S portal: Romanesque, plain, apart from scalloped capitals. 9) Matching, but smaller, N portal, with same scalloped capitals. 10) Angels holding shields on W door of tower. 	

		10)Angels holding shields on W door of tower.
	Architectural history	Originally a C12th church, with embellishment and extensions during C13th and C15th. The E end of the church has a greater predominance of red sandstone, probably C13th. The phallic man would appear to be contemporary and in original situ with the E end wall. The windows of the E end appear to be C13th. The windows of the S wall of the nave look late, C16th or C17th. There is a blocked-up priest's door in the S side of the E end of the church.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 154]: The so-called 'sheela' figure at Abson is only referred to by McMahon & Roberts (but is also on J. Harding's website), and was brought to their attention by Keith and Gillian Jones; no further reference for the provision of this information is given. We can deduce , therefore, that McMahon & Roberts have not visited this site to verify the 'sheela' in person. Their description (presumably from the Joneses) is as follows: "High on the east wall of the tower of the church ... a Sheela-na-Gig can be seen. It is uniquely situated at the base of an unidentifiable effigy, set within a box. The Sheela, though weathered, can be clearly seen to have splayed spindly legs which are bent at the knees. This is the only Sheela in Britain so far recorded that is set on its side and the only one so far found in this context of being laid at the foot of another figure. Although the Sheela appears to be carved in a classic pose what is possibly a long protuberance is visible below the right arm extending from the lower abdomen which could perhaps delineate a different gender for the figure."
	Other information / comments	I think the so-called 'sheela' figure is actually a clothed, male figure, probably late C15th judging from its attire. The description by McMahon & Roberts / the Joneses does not include any mention of the attire of the figure, although the "long protuberance" [which I think is possibly a sword] is reported. This figure is very high up, but with powerful binoculars / telephoto lens it is possible to see that it is not a sheela-na-gig, as my photo shows.


2	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Helen's Church, Darley Dale / Derbyshire Edge of small town 27 July 2001 Church, founded c. AD 900 Centrally above Gothic W doorway of tower (now enclosed by modern extension for church hall opened April 1992) Primary	
	Description of sheela	This figure is definitely not a sheela and has been completely misidentified. It is a tonsured monk who appears to be kissing his rear end. The tonsure is extremely clear.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Some very ancient grave slabs with Celtic designs, kept in the porch, and some very old stone coffins in the grave yard.	
	Architectural history		
	Other features	Very ancient yew tree in graveyard, c. 2000 years old.	
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001: 159]: is the only reference to this figure. They were provided with the information by J. Harding's website (which McMahon & Roberts recommend). They say, "it is badly weathered but carved in a similar style to the nearby Haddon Hall figure with its legs raised above its head and its heavy set arms reaching around its buttocks. What looks like a small cap can be seen on its head." Clearly they have not been to see this figure, and have merely accepted what J. Harding has described without verifying it.	
	Other information / comments	Not a sheela-na-gig. This example demonstrates the dangers of a website list which is not accurate, the information from which then gets assimilated into a popular literature publication.	

3 & 4	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	St Peter's Church / Diddlebury / Herefordshire 23 July 2001 Saxon church Exterior, 2 figures on S wall of tower Secondary	
	Description of sheela	<p>I have not recorded these figures, other than photographing them, as I think it is highly unlikely that they are sheelas. Roberts has called these figures corbels – but although they have been placed in position as though corbels, they are not in original situ. The right hand figure clearly has ‘cement’ showing at the sides and round the top to fix her to the wall; similarly, the left hand one clearly shows mortar fixing her, and both mortars match other mortar used nearby for repairing the stonework beneath the string-course (ledge). I would say that there is not sufficient evidence to say that the figures are sheelas.</p> <p>For comparison, there are 3 original corbels on the W wall of the tower, that are clearly a) contemporary with that part of the church, and b) in original situ. Below them is a simple Romanesque arched doorway with a figural human head above it that has Romanesque features. The 2 ‘sheelas’ do not have any Romanesque features, and are of later date, particularly the left hand figure. They are both quite badly damaged.</p>	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history	Blocked-up simple Saxon doorway to N wall. S wall has a slightly later blocked-up doorway, with a slightly pointed arch.	
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) McMahon & Roberts [2001: 159]: List Diddlebury as being in ‘Hertfordshire’, “set about ten kilometres south-east of Church Stretton. There are two figures on adjacent corbels on the outside of this church. <i>Figure (A)</i> is badly worn in the lower section and her right leg is broken off	


		ten kilometres south-east of Church Stretton. There are two figures on adjacent corbels on the outside of this church. <i>Figure (A)</i> is badly worn in the lower section and her right leg is broken off below the knee. This leg appears to bend outward whilst it seems that she is holding her left leg over her shoulder and her left arm extends towards the vulva. <i>Figure (B)</i> is also badly worn in the lower portion and it is difficult to gain a clear idea of how her right leg is supposed to be positioned but it seems that her right hand touches the side of her face. These figures were brought to out attention by Keith and Gillian Jones.”
	Other information / comments	New ‘supposed’ sheelas, listed in McMahon & Roberts’ [2001] book only.

5 & 6	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Wells Cathedral Somerset Small city centre August 2001 Cathedral 2 carved stone roof bosses in W cloister: Fig. A is at S end of W cloister, third bay in; fig. B is in second bay in from N porch c. 12' Primary	 <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 5px;"> A B </div>
	Description of sheela	Fig. A: More an acrobat or tumbler than a sheela, and reminiscent of a twin-tailed mermaid. On one side of this figure is another boss of a man holding a cleaver, on the other is a cow or ox curled round itself. Fig. B: is more like a sheela but is, I think, an exhibitionist, although the genitalia are not clearly visible at all. However, there is a third figure in the same bay that does look more like a sheela proper, but I was unable to get a photograph of this figure.	
	Other sculpture/decoration		
	Architectural history	Roof bosses are C14th / C15th, some possibly even C16th.	
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	a) <u>Cave</u> [1948: 214]: Refers to the roof bosses in the cloisters, "some of them grotesque, men at stool, and also two sheilas of an unusual type". b) <u>Hutchinson & Hutchinson</u> [1969]: Not in c) <u>Andersen</u> [1977: 144]: Accepts these figures as sheela "on Mr Cave's authority". No photo. d) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: List Wells in the gazetteer, but this may be for other figures than sheelas, as they are not on the distribution map, or in List 'A' England and Wales [p.116]. e) <u>Roberts</u> [1995: 18]: Not accurate description of location "amongst the carvings on the roof bosses ...", then he quotes Cave as Andersen has. No drawing.	



		f) McMahon & Roberts [2001: 167]: with two fairly accurate drawings. Unfortunately, McMahon & Roberts give the impression that the sheelas are on the West front: "St Andrew's cathedral at Wells is famous for its highly decorative west front, completed in 1230. One of the figures is shown grasping her legs and exposing the vulva whilst the second figure has her arms and legs bent back and seems to be exposing her whole body."
	Other information / comments	These bosses were extremely difficult to look at and record properly as the W cloister is also the tea room. A closer inspection would be very useful.

7	Site Townland/County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St Pol de Leon, Paul Penzance / Cornwall Small village 13 March 2003; 7 October 2003 Parish church SW corner of tower 60'-70' Primary Granite	
	Description of 'sheela'	Unlikely to be a sheela. Looks more like a type of mouth-puller.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	At SE corner of the tower is another mouth-puller, although even more weathered than this one.	
	Architectural history	Tower is early C15th. More information about the church and its history is to be found on the church's website: www.paulchurch.co.uk	
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	I became aware of this figure from a short inclusion in <i>Meyn Mamvro</i> , a magazine focusing on Cornish archaeology and Earth Mysteries, which is edited by Cheryl Straffon. No. 50 (winter/spring 2003) mentioned a visit to the above figure which was described as a possible sheela-na-gig.	
	Other information / comments	Although it is difficult to discern exactly what this is an image of, there are two strong factors which suggest it is not a sheela (apart from any iconographic reasons). 1) Location on the building. There are no other examples of sheelas found at the top corner	



		<p>of a church tower. Mouth-pullers, grotesques, and hybrid beasts are found in this location, however.</p> <p>2) Granite is not a stone favoured for sculpting images on churches, because it is such a hard stone. No fine detail can be executed with such a stone. There are no other examples of sheelas carved out of granite anywhere. Indeed, these two (probably originally four) images are the only exterior sculpture on this granite church.</p> <p>However, I would like to gain a closer look at this image just to see exactly <i>what</i> it is!</p>
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8	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of SS Peter & Paul, Rock Worcestershire Village August 2004 Parish church S side of chancel arch, top of capital at outer order on right hand side c.12' Primary	 <p>Outline sketch of Rock figure</p>
	Description of sheela	Not a sheela. More in common with mermaid imagery due to the presence of a serpent which winds itself through the figure, and actually pierces the figure's right thigh. The image appears to have hair, a head in ratio to the rest of the body, although the arms, and especially the legs, are far too long. The hands with fingers are clearly visible, holding each leg wide apart, her right hand at the right knee, her left below the left knee. The upper arms are very full coming up from a third of the way down the torso. Although the legs are wide apart there is no hint of a vulva. There is a round-shaped object directly under the vulval area. No indication of breasts. Ears are visible. The serpent's head goes to the figure's right ear, its tail to her left. I think the image has a strong Mesopotamian influence.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	3-petalled flowers at top corners either side of 'sheela' image. Next to the image is a centaur, suggesting the 'sheela' is more mermaid-like as centaurs and mermaids are linked in the bestiaries.	
	Architectural history		
	Other features		
	Topography		
	Referred to by other authors	On John Harding's website [www.sheelanagig.org].	
	Other information		


PART D: 'NEW' SHEELAS

1	Site County General location Date visited Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Church of St John, Devizes Wiltshire Town 18 May 2002 Exterior, N wall of chancel, 2 nd corbel at E end, left figure of pair. Part of remaining corbel-table of 6 corbels 24'-25' Primary Honey-coloured stone (local sandstone?)		
	Description of sheela	Squatting position. Arms have been broken off. Head: bald, disproportionately large to rest of body. Neck: none. Head rests on shoulders and upper torso. Eyes, nose and mouth visible. Vulva: disproportionately large and very well defined.		
	Other sculpture/decoration	Male figure to her left, with erect penis in his right hand. It is interesting that these two images are both leaning away from each other. Thus, the male's erect penis may not necessarily be directly linked with being placed next to a female image revealing her vulva. The reason for the imagery is probably less overt, and not be sexual in the modern sense. Other 5 corbels, from E to W: 1) Squatting mouth-puller, with tongue protruding; 3) Two beast-heads with open mouths and teeth; 4) Beast-head and another figure, sharing a rope held in their mouths, the figure also motioning to its mouth with its left hand; 5) Beast-head with snout-like nose, and open mouth with teeth; 6) Beast-head with open mouth, inside which is an embracing 'human' pair. Richly embellished with Romanesque motifs: the chancel arches have chevron and other patterns, the capitals have geometric, scallop and foliate designs, and a Green Man image.		

	Architectural history	Church built in the 1160s within the outer bailey of the Norman castle. Modified during the C13th and C14th. Extant building represents C15th alterations with additions of N and S chapels, and enlargement of the nave.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	<p>a) <u>Andersen</u> [1977]: Not in.</p> <p>b) <u>Weir & Jerman</u> [1986]: Devizes is listed in gazetteer [p.161], but no indication which image they are referring to. Not on their distribution map of exhibitionists for England and Wales [p.128].</p> <p>c) <u>Roberts</u> [1995]: Not in.</p> <p>d) <u>McMahon & Roberts</u> [2001]: Not in.</p>
	Other information / comments	<p>Clearly a wealthy patron given the amount and type of sculpture. Another example, perhaps, indicating a link between the demonstration of high status (of the patron?) and incorporating a sheela into the sculptural imagery.</p> <p>This figure was alerted to me by Alex Woodcock.</p>

2	Site County General location Date visited Building type Location within building Ht. above ground Primary/ secondary insertion Geology	Conduit Street, Rye E. Sussex Town 8 February 2003 Augustinian friary site On W wall, N label stop of window c. 20' Probably secondary Sandstone		
	Description of sheela	<p>A very weathered figure. Face is very worn, although a vague impression of nose and mouth is visible. Head: sits on torso, no neck. The top part of the head is flat, probably damaged; thus, the top half of the head is missing. Breasts: none visible. Shoulders: very well defined and large, with very large arms. Arms: her right arm is well-defined but the hand is damaged, although it is pointing towards the open vulva. Her left arm is also well-defined with the left hand resting on the left knee. Fingers on her left hand are discernible but cannot see clearly how many. Legs: too small in relation to rest of body. Her right leg is bent at the knee, bent back in a kneeling-type position. Her right foot is clearly visible. Her left leg is bent back at the</p>		

		side of the body, in the same way that the right is. Her left foot is clearly visible. Vulva: very obvious with a round object coming out of it.
	Other sculpture/decoration	At the right of the window, S label stop, there is another even more weathered image, of a head with head-dress.
	Architectural history	The window is probably the only remaining part of the Augustinian friary built c. 1380.
	Other features	
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	None
	Other information / comments	The sheela may be in original situ as the stonework she is on matches the lines of the stone above her as part of the window. However, it is most unusual to find a sheela in original situ in this particular location on a building, and thus it seems more likely that she has been removed from somewhere else and placed here subsequently, when the window was being made in the late C14th.

3	Site / OS ref (1:50 000) County General location Date visited Building type Location within building	Exeter Cathedral Devon City centre September 2004 Cathedral Corbel table, N side of S tower	 <p>(Photo: A. Woodcock)</p>
	Ht. above ground		
	Primary/ secondary insertion	Primary	
	Geology	Sandstone	
	Description of sheela	Typical corbel size: 9" wide, 8"-9" tall, 6" deep. Head: very large, c. 7" wide at widest point, & 5"-5.5" long. Eyes: round, prominent, hole in centre. Nose: Long, triangular. Mouth: Was present but now damaged. Hair or headdress. Squatting position, very similar to sheela at Worth Matravers. Hunched shoulders with head lower at front than shoulders. Arms: Coming round to front of image to clasp outer edge of wide vulva, which possible has something in it. Long, thin arms. Her right hand clearly has 4 fingers present, left hand too worn to discern. Vulva: 2.25" long by 1.25" at widest point. Legs: Both were originally present but both now badly damaged, especially her left, which has only a denuded stump remaining. Her right leg indicates that it was originally in a knee-bent position, with probably toes indicated. Not clear whether above-knee part of leg would have been attached to rest of image or whether sculpted separately. Not possible to see where it would have joined main part of image.	
	Other sculpture/decoration	Sheela is part of a corbel table which has 2 other exhibitionists, both of which look male (i.e. phalli present), although one is a bit ambiguous but looks more phallic than vulval.	

	Architectural history	South tower lower sections are c. 1140-50; top sections (including corbel table) are c.1170-1200.
	Topography	
	Referred to by other authors	None.
	Other information / comments	Description taken from a cast provided by Exeter Museum, which has 7 other corbel casts (all taken in 1990). This site is another example which supports my theory of sheelas being used to demonstrate status, Exeter Cathedral obviously being a very high status building. Thanks to Alex Woodcock for drawing my attention to this sheela.

APPENDIX TWO

TABULATED DATA

Information derived from the raw data collected within my fieldwork, which forms Appendix One (the gazetteer) and which, when analysed, produced the charts in Chapter Two.

A: Ireland

B: Britain

LEGEND

LRAH = left raised above head
RRAH = right raised above head
LIFB = left in front of body
RIFB = right in front of body
LBB = left behind body
RBB = right behind body
BAAS = both arms at sides
BOAE = bent out at elbows
HRK = hands round knees

LWA = legs wide apart
LT = legs together
BBP = belly button present
IRTRB = in relation to rest of body
LE = left ear
RE = right ear
DL = disproportionately large
KSB = knees slightly bent
FIV = fingers in vulva

Record							Breasts	
No.	County	Site	Vulva shown	Vulva DL	FIV	Anus	Present	Round
1	Longford	Abbeylara	Y	N	N	Y	?	N/A
2	Galway	Ballinderry	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
3	Tipperary	Ballyfinboy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
4	Cork	Ballynacarriga	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A
5	Tipp.	Ballynaclogh						
6	Tipp.	Ballynahinch	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N/A
7	Cork	Ballyvourney	N	N/A	N	N	N	N/A
8	Sligo	Behy	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
9	Kildare	Blackhall	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
10	Clare	Bunratty	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
11	Tipp.	Cashel (a)	Y	N	Y	?	N	N
12	Tipp.	Cashel (b)	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
13	Tipp.	Cashel (c)	Y?	N	N	N	Y	N
14	Cork	Castlemagner	N	N	N	N	Y	N
15	Roscommon	Cloghan	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
16	Kilkenny	Clomantagh	Y	N	N?	?	Y	N
17	Offaly	Clonmacnoise	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
		(Nuns' Chapel)						
18	Offaly	Doon	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
19	Limerick	Dunnaman	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
20	Tipp.	Fethard Abbey	N	N/A	N	N	N	N/A
21	Tipp.	Fethard town	Y	N	Y	N	N	N/A
22	Tipp.	Holycross Abbey	N (damaged)	N/A	N	N	?	N/A
23	Kildare	Kildare Cathedral	N	N/A	N	N	Y	Y
24	Clare	Killinaboy	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
25	Tipp.	Kiltinan (stolen)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
26	Tipp.	Liathmor	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y (R)
27	Westmeath	Moate	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

28	Clare	Rathblathmac	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y
29	Tipp.	Redwood	Y	N	?	Y	?	?
30	Roscommon	Scregg (r.h.fig.)	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
		Scregg (l.h.fig.)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A
31	Westmeath	Taghmon	?	N	N	Y	N	N/A
33	Limerick	Tullovin	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y

Record	Breast		Breasts			Arm position				Bent out at elbow		Arms at sides	
No.	Pendulous	Nipples	Under arms	LRAH	RRAH	LIFB	RIFB	LBB	RBB	Left arm	Right arm	Left	Right
1	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
4	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N
5													
6	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
7	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
9	N/A	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
10	N/A	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
11	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
12	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
13	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
14	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
15	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
16	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
17	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

18	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N		N
19	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
20	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
21	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
22	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	?	?	N	?	Y	?Y	N	N
23	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
24	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
25	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
26	Y (L)	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
27	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
28	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
29	?	?	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
30	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	Y	N	N	Y?	N	N	N	N
31	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
33	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y

Record		Arms IRTRB						Legs
No.	Too large	Too small	HRK	In ratio	KSB WA	Straight WA	Straight	Squatting, LWA
1	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A	N	N	N	N
2	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
3	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
4	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
5								
6	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
7	N	N	N	Y	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
8	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
9	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
10	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
11	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y

12	N/A	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	N	N
13	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y?
14	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
15	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
16	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
17	N/A	N/A	N	N/A	N	N	N	N
18	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
19	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
20	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
21	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
22	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y?
23	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
24	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
25	Y (R)	Y (L)	N	N	N	N	N	Y
26	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
27	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	?
28	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
29	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
30	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
31	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
33	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y

Record No.	Up, WA & out to sides	Crouched, LT	Legs to ears	Feet meet at heels	Too large	Legs ITRB Too small	In ratio	Ribs present
1	N	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N
2	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
3	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
4	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
5				(Y)				

6	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
7	N	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N
8	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
9	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
10	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
11	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
13	N	N	N	N	?	?	?	N
14	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
15	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
16	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	?
17	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
18	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
19	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
20	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
21	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
22	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
23	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
24	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
25	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
26	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	?
27	N	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N
28	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
29	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
30	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
31	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
33	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	?

Record	Striation	Belly			Head IRTB			Brow
No.	marks	distended	BBP	Neck	Too large	Too small	In ratio	Furrowed lines
1	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N/A
2	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
3	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
4	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
5								
6	N	N	N	?	Y	N	N	Y
7	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
8	N	?	N	N	Y	N	N	N
9	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
10	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
11	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
12	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
13	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
14	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N
15	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
16	N	?	?	Y	N	N	Y	N
17	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
18	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
19	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
20	Y	N	Y	?	Y	N	N	Y
21	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	?
22	N	Y	?	N	Y	N	N	N
23	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
24	Y (neck)	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
25	N	Y	?	Y	Y	N	N	N
26	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
27	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
28	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N

29	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	
30	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	?
	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
31	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
33	?	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N

Record No.	Large	Eyes			Almond-shaped	Straight line	Down-turned	Mouth		Tongue protruding	Teeth
1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N
2	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N/A	Y	N/A	N
3	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N
4	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
5											
6	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
7	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
8	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
9	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
10	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
11	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
12	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
13	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	?	?	?	?
14	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
15	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
16	N	Y	?	?	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N
17	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
18	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	?	N	N
19	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
20	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
21	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
22	?	N/A	N/A	N/A	?	N	N	?	?	?	N

23	N	N	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
24	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
25	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
26	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
27	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
28	Y	N	N	Y	?	?	?	?	?	?
29	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
30	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
	N	Y	?	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N
31	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y
33	N	Y	?	?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Record		Nose				Ears		Hair	
No.	Present	Triangular	Oblong	Nostrils	LE present	RE present	Celtic'	Bald head	Plaits
1	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
2	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
3	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
4	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
5									
6	Y	?	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
7	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
8	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	?	N	Y	N
9	Y	?	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
10	Y	N	Y	?	N	N	N	Y	N
11	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
12	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
13	Y	Y	N	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
14	Y	N	N	?	N	N	N	Y	N
15	Y	Y	N	?	N	N	N	N	N
16	Y	Y	N	?	N	N	N	Y	N

17	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
18	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
19	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
20	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
21	Y	N	?	?	N	N	N/A	N	N
22	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N/A	Y	N
23	Y	?	?	?	?	?	N	N	N
24	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N
25	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
26	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
27	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
28	Y	?	?	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
29	Y	?	?	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
30	Y	?	?	?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
	Y	?	?	?	N	N	N/A	Y	N
31	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N/A	Y	N
33	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N

Record No.	In the round	Carved Bas relief	Incised	Patterns / objects associated					
				6-petalled flower	8-petalled flower	Triquetra	Triskele		
1	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N		
2	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y		
3	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
4	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
5									
6	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
7	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
8	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		
9	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N		

10	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
11	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
12	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
13	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
14	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
15	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
16	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
17	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
18	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
19	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
20	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
21	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
22	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
23	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
24	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
25	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
26	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
27	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
28	N	Y	N	Serpent-like	beasts	Scandin-	avian
29	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
30	N	Y	N	Horizontal	lines around	image	
	N	Y	N	None			
31	Y	N	N	None			
33	N	Y	N	None			

Record	Object	Torc/rope	Stick-like	Ball			Veil /
No.	below vulva	sickle	object	decoration	Cone	Foliage	Hat / hood
1	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
5							
6	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
10	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
11	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
12	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
13	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
14	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
15	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
16	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
17	N	N	N	N	N	N	?
18	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
19	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
21	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
22	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
23	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
24	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
25	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
26	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
27	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
28	style	inter-	twined	foliage	N	Y	N

29	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
30							
31							
33							

Record	Figure size					Above	Above		
No.	height (ins.)	width (ins.)	Quoin	Horizontal	Voussoir	door	window	Interior	Exterior
1	14	8	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
2	10	13	N	N	?	Y	N	N	Y
3	15	24	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
4	24	11	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
5									
6	18	12	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
7	9.5	4.5	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
8	?	?	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
9	26	12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
10	?	?	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
11	?	?	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
12	32	12	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
13	24	12	N/A	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	21.5	12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
15	12	18	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
16	c.24	c.12	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
17	4	3	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
18	24	14	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
19	24	24	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
20	24	6-10	N	N	?	N	N	N	Y
21	24	10-12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y

22	c.15	c.12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
23	3	5	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
24	26	12	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
25	32	20	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
26	6	20	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
27	10	6	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
28	8	5	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
29	c.14	c.10	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
30	11	6	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y
	4.5	6	?	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
31	14	14	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
33	26	18	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y

Record No.	Primary	Church	Tower house	Date of building	Ht. above ground (ft.)	Position
1	Y	Y	N	C13th	13-14	S wall of tower
2	?	N	Y	C16th/C17th	6.5	E wall
3	Y	N	Y	C15th/C16th	6.6-7	W wall at S corner
4	Y	N	Y	C16th	c.40	E wall at N edge
5						
6	N	N	Y	C17th?	c.20	E wall
7	N	Y	N	?	10-10.6	S wall nave, E end
8	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
9	Y	N	Y	C13th?	c.5	W wall (now ex-situ)
10	N	N	Y	?	c.5	S wall (recent)
11	Y	N	N	c15th	c.25	E wall
12	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A
13	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
14	N	N	N	C18th?	0	E wall well-house

15	Y	N	Y	C16th/C17th	c.30	SE wall at S corner
16	Y	N	Y	C14th/C15th	c.45	S wall at SE corner
17	Y	Y	N	C12th	c.12	Chancel arch (E)
						facing W into nave
18	Y	N	Y	?	15	E wall at S corner
19	Y	N	Y	C16th/C17th	35-40	E wall
20	N	Y	N	C15th +	4.5	N wall, E of E end of church
21	N	N	N	?	c.10	S wall at entrance to town
22	N	N	N	c.C14th/C15th	c.14	S wall of cellar, facing road
23	Y	Y	N	C16th	3	On C16th tomb
24	N	Y	N	c.C12th +	10	S wall above round-arch door
25	N?	Y	N	c.C14th	10	W wall at S corner
26	Y	Y	N	C12th	5	N doorway, left side
27	N	N	N	C17th	7.5	W wall above C17th door at rear of house
28	N	Y	N	C13th/C14th?	5	S wall nave (re-used window lintel)
29	Y?	N	Y	c. C17th	50 +	E wall
30	N	N	N	c.C18th/C19th	13	To right of main doorway of stone outbuilding
	N	N	N	c.C18th/C19th	13	To right of main doorway of stone outbuilding
31	N	Y	N	C15th	8	N wall, immediately above a window
33	Y	N	Y	c.C15th/C16th	35-40	S wall

Record No.	Associated with water	Other local arch. feat.	Poss. Pregnant
1	Y	Y	?
2	N	N	Y
3	N	N	Y
4	Y	Y	N
5	N	Y	?
6	Y	Y	N
7	Y	N	N
8	N	N	N
9	N	N	N
10	Y	N	N
11	N	Y	N
12	N/A	N/A	N/A
13	N/A	N/A	N
14	Y	N	Y
15	N	N	N
16	N	Y	N
17	N	Y	N
18	Y	Y	N
19	N	N	N
20	N	N	N
21	Y	Y	Y
22	N	N	Y
23	N/A	N/A	N/A
24	Y	Y	N
25	N	Y	Y
26	N	Y	N
27	N	N	Y

Record No.	Associated with water	Other local arch. feat.	Poss. Pregnant
28	Y	Y	Y
29	N	N	N
30 (a)	N	Y	N
(b)	N	Y	Y
31	N	Y	Y
33	N	N	N

Record							Breasts			Breasts		Arm position	
No.	County	Site	Vulva shown	Vulva DL	FIV	Anus	Present	Round	Pendulous	Nipples	Under arms	LRAH	RRAH
1	Glos.	Ampney St Peter	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y (L)	N	N
2	S.Yorks	Austerfield	Y	N	?	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
3	N.Yorks.	Bilton-in-Ainsty	Y	Y?	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
4	N.Yorks.	Bilton-in-Ainsty	?	?	?	?	Y	?	?	?	N	N	N
6	ER Yorks.	Bridlington Priory											
7	ER Yorks.	Bridlington Priory	?	N	?	N	?Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
8	Bucks.	Buckland	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
9	W. Sussex	Buncton	Y (defaced)	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
10	Shrops.	Church Stretton	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y?	N	N	N	N	N
11	N. Yorks.	Copgrove	Y	Y	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
12	N. Yorks.	Croft-on-Tees	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
13	Somerset	Fiddington	Y (defaced)	N	N	N	N?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	N
14	Derbyshire	Haddon Hall	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
15	Shropshire	Holdgate	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
16	Herefords.	Kilpeck	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
17	Radnors.	Llandrindod Wells	Y	Y	Y	Y?	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
18	Wilts.	Oaksey	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y?	Y	N	N
20	Anglesey	Penmon (a)	N	N/A	N/A	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
21	Anglesey	Penmon (b)	Y	Y	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	Y
22	Hants.	Romsey	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y (L)	N	N
23	Devon	South Tawton	Y	N	N	N	N?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
24	Wilts.	Stanton St Quintin	Y	Y	Y?	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
25	Somerset	Stoke-sub-Hamdon (a)	Y	N	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
26	Somerset	Stoke-sub-Hamdon (b)	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y (R)	Y (L)	Y (R)	N	N	N/A
28	Shrops.	Tugford (a)	Y	N	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N
29	Shrops.	Tugford (b)	N (damaged)	N/A	N/A	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	Y
30	Cambs.	Whittlesford	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y?	N	N
31	Dorset	Worth Matravers	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N

Record		Arm position			Bent out at elbow		Arms at sides		Arms ITRB				Legs			
No.	LIFB	RIFB	LBB	RBB	Left arm	Right arm	Left	Right	Too large	Too small	HRK	In ratio	KSB WA	Straight WA	Straight	
1	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y(L)	Y(R)	N	
2	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	
3	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
4	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
6																
7	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
8	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	?	?	N	
9	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	
10	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	
11	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	
12	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	
13	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
14	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
15	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	
16	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
17	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
18	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	
20	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	
21	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	N	N	
22	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	
23	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
24	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	
25	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	
26	N	N/A	N	N/A	Y	N/A	Y	N/A	Y	N	N	N	Y (L)	N	N	
28	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
29	N	N	N	N	Missing	N	N	N	N	?	N	?	N	N	N	
30	N	N	N	Y	?	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	
31	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	

Record	Legs	Up, WA &	Crouched,	Legs to	Feet meet	Legs IRTRB			Ribs	Striation	Belly	
No.	Squatting, LWA	out to sides	LT	ears	at heels	Too large	Too small	In ratio	present	marks	distended	BBP
1	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
2	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
4	Y	N	N	N	N	?	?	?	N	N	N	N
6												
7	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	?	N
8	N	N	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	N
9	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
10	N	N	Y?	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
11	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
12	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
13	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
14	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
15	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
16	?	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
17	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
18	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
20	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
21	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
22	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
23	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	?
24	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y
25	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
26	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y (L)	N	N	N	Y	Y?
28	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
29	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
30	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	?	?	N
31	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N

Record		Head			Brow	Eyes				
No.	Neck	IRTRB	Too large	Too small	In ratio	Furrowed lines	Large	Small	Round	Almond
1	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y (R)	N	N
3	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
4	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	?	?	?
6										
7	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
8	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
9	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
10	Y	?	N	Y	N	N	N	Y(R)	N	N
11	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
12	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
13	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
14	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
15	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
16	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
17	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N
18	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
20	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N
21	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
22	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
23	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N
24	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N
25	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
26	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	?	?
28	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
29	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
30	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
31	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N

Record	Mouth				Tongue	Teeth	Nose				Ears			Hair	
No.	Straight line	Down-turned	Open	Smiling	protruding		Present	Triangular	Oblong	Nostrils	LE present	RE present	'Celtic'	Bald head	Plaits
1	N	N	Y?	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N
2	N	N	N	Y?	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	N	N
3	?	?	?	?	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	Y	N
6															
7	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	N	N	Y?	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
9	Y	Y?	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y?	N	Y	N
10	Y	N	N	Y?	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y?	N	N	N	Y	N
11	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N	N	N	Y	N
12	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
13	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
14	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
15	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y?	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
16	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N
17	Y	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N?	N
18	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N?	N?	N	Y	N
20	Y?	N	N	N	N	N	Y	?	?	N	N	Y	N	Y	N
21	N	N	N	N	N	N	?	?	?	?	N	N	N	Y	N
22	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y?	N	N	N	Y	N
23	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
24	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
25	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
26	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	?	?	?	N	N	N	N	N
28	Y	N	Y	N	Y	?	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
29	N	N	Y	?	?	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
30	N	?	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N
31	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N

Record	Carved			Patterns / objects associated				Object	Torc/rope	Stick-like
No.	In the round	Bas relief	Incised	6-petalled flower	8-petalled flower	Triquetra	Triskele	below vulva	sickle	object
1	Head	Y	N	NONE				N	N	N
2	Almost	Y	N	N	N	N	N			
3	Almost	Y	N	NONE						
4	N	Y	N	NONE						
6										
7	N	Y	N	NONE						
8	N	Y	N	NONE				geometric	triangles'	design.
9	N	Y	N	Alternating block design;	triple	hatched	balls;			
10	N	Y	N	4-petalled	5-petalled	flowers				
11	N	N	Y	Disc-like object	in her right hand; T or	cross-sha	ped	object		
12	N	Y	N	NONE						
13	N	N	Y	NONE						
14	N	Y	N	NONE						
15	Y	N	N	NONE						
16	N	Y	N	NONE						
17	N	Y	N	NONE						
18	N	Y	N	NONE						
20	Almost	Y	N	NONE						
21	N	Y	N	Next to another	similar image					
22	N	Y	N					Y		Y (2)
23	N	Y	N	5-petalled flower	boss at her right,	foliate leaf	at her	left, Green	Man in	front of her
24	N	Y	N							Y (2)
25	Almost	Y	N	Two other corbels						
26	Almost	N	N	NONE						
28	Almost	N	N	NONE						
29	Almost	N	N	NONE						
30	N	Y	N	Male fig. with erect penis	next to her					
31	Almost	Y	N	To sheela's right is a lion, to her left a bird of prey						

Record No.	Ball decoration	Cone	Foliage	Veil / Hat / hood	Figure size height (ins.)	width (ins.)	Quoin	Horizontal	Voussoir	Corbel	Above door	Above window
1	N	N	Y		12	8	N	N	N	N	Y	N
2				Y	11.5	15	N	N	N	N	N	N
3					?	?	N	N	N	Y	N	N
4					?	?	N	N	N	Y	N	N
6												
7					?	?	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	Y				16	11	N	N	N	N	Y	N
9					9	2.5	N	Y	N	N	N	N
10					18	9	N	N	N	N	Y	N
11					12	10	Y(orig.)?	N	N	N	N	N
12					21	8	N	N	N	N	Y	N
13					11.5	11.5	Y	N	N	N	Y	N
14					16	18	N	N	N	N	Y(orig.)?	N
15					?	?	N	N	N	N	N	Y
16					10	8	N	N	N	Y	N	N
17					22	18	?	?	N	N	?	?
18					12	6	?	?	N	N	Y	Y
20					24	18	N	N	N	N	N	N
21					?	?	N	N	N	N	Y	N
22					15	12	N	N	N	N	N	Y
23			Y		c.24	c.18	N	N	N	N	N	N
24					12	10	N (near)	N	N	N	N	Y
25					12	10	N	N	N	Y	N	Y
26					12	30	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
28					6	5.5	N	N	N	N (Y?)	Y	N
29					7	4	N	Y	N	N (Y?)	Y	N
30					c.18	c.24	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
31					c.10	c.8	N	N	N	Y	N	N

Record No.	Interior	Exterior	Primary	Church	Tower house	Date of building	Ht. above ground (ft.)
1	Y	N	N	Y	N	C13th/C14th	6.5-7
2	Y	N	Y	Y	N	C12th	5.33
3	Y	Y (orig.)	Y	Y	N	C12th	12
4	Y	Y (orig.)	Y	Y	N	C12th	12
6							
7	Y	N	Y	Y	N	C13th/C14th	35
8	N	Y	N	Y	N	C12th/C13th	8
9	Y	N	N	Y	N	C12th	11
10	N	Y	Y?	Y	N	C12th?	16
11	Y	Y(orig.)	N	Y	N	C12th	N/A
12	Y	N	N	Y	N	C12th	6
13	N	Y	N	Y	N	C14th?	11
14	?	?	N	N	N	C17th	N/A
15	N	Y	?	Y	N	C12th	15
16	N	Y	Y	Y	N	C12th	14
17	?	?	N	N	N	N/A	N/A
18	N	Y	N	Y	N	C15th	15
20	Y	Y(orig.)	N	Y	N	C12th	N/A
21	Y	N	N	Y	N	C12th	N/A
22	N	Y	Y	Y	N	C12th	c.30
23	Y	N	Y	Y	N	C15th/C16th	c.20
24	N	Y	Y?	Y	N	C12th/C19th	35
25	N	Y	Y	Y	N	C12th	12-15
26	N	Y	Y	Y	N	C15th garg.	12-15
28	Y	Y(orig.?)	N	Y	N	C11th/C12th	7
29	Y	Y(orig.?)	N	Y	N	C11th/C12th	7
30	N	Y	N?	Y	N	C10th/C11th	30-35
31	N	Y	Y?	Y	N	C12th	12

Record No.	Position	Associated with water	Other local arch. feat.	Poss. preg.
1	N wall, to right of original door, near font	N	N	N
2	Capital of arch nearest altar, N aisle, facing into nave	N	N	Y
3	N wall, E end	N	N	N
4	N wall, E end	Y		
6	Ex-situ (not yet recorded by me)	Y		N
7	Base of spandrel at S and W wall juncture	N	N	N
8	S wall, E end	Y	Y	N
9	Top of capital at S side of chancel arch, on underside of the cornice	N	N	N
10	Above Romanesque N doorway	N	Y	N
11	S wall nave near chancel; earlier, exterior NE corner N wall (Victorian extension)	Y	N	N
12	S wall nave, to left of doorway			
13	SE corner of nave wall, close to chancel end, near the priest's door	N	N	N
14	On a wall in old stable block	N	Y	N
15	S wall, at E end			
16	S wall, outer chancel apse	N	N	N
17	Ex-situ	Y	Y	N
18	N wall, at E side of porch, and to right of window	Y	Y	N
20	W wall, S transept,	N	N	N
21	W wall crossing arch. Probably not a sheela though.	N	N	N
22	W wall, N transept	N	N	N
23	Wooden roof boss, S side nave at W end	N	N	N
24	N side of tower at E end near quoin stone	Y	N	Y
25	N wall of chancel	N	N	N
26	S wall of nave	N	N	N
28	Inside S doorway at right. Possibly originally a corbel.			
29	Inside S doorway at left. Possibly originally a corbel.			
30	S wall of tower; tower approx. C14th/C15th			
31	N wall of nave			

APPENDIX THREE

Specific bibliography for sheela-na-gig studies

Abbreviations:

JCHAS	Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
JKAS	Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society
JRHAAI	Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland
JRSAI	Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland
NMAJ	North Munster Antiquarian Journal
PCAS	Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society
PRIA	Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy
JNMAS	Journal of the North Munster Archaeological Society
JRHAS	Journal of the Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society
SANH	Somerset Archaeology and Natural History

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Abbreviations

JBAA	Journal of the British Archaeological Association
JCHAS	Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society
JRSAI	Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland
RSAI	Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland
SANH	Somerset Archaeology & Natural History

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